ISSUE 182 | SEPTEMBER 2010

DUNGEON®

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

ISSUE NO. 182

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DUNGEON *September 2010*

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The Return of the King

Rather than focus on one topic, this month's editorial will be something of a goulash.

First: this month's cover.

I suppose it's possible that someone could look at the cover on this issue and think, "oh, that's nice," and move on without a blink. Possible, but hard to imagine. That's because this month's cover painting is by a giant in the RPG industry: none other than Larry Elmore himself.

I'd like to be able to say that Larry's return to *Dungeon* magazine was my doing, but I can't. For that, we can thank our hard-working, long-suffering art director, Mr. Jon Schindehette. Jon puts up with mountains of grief from me, and then he turns around and delivers a Larry Elmore cover to help celebrate the release of the new Dungeons & Dragons® Starter Set.

My association with Larry goes back to the very early 1980s, when he was hired by TSR. Larry became an instant star thanks to his tremendous talent. For almost two decades, Elmore art was synonymous with D&D and AD&D.

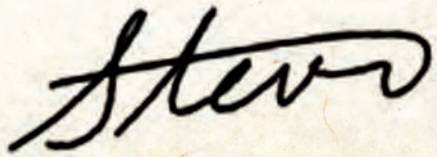
Of the hundreds of covers that Larry painted, the one that probably was seen by more eyes than any other—possibly by more eyes than any other D&D painting, period—was the cover of the 1984 "red box" edition of Basic D&D, the box that introduced countless tens of thousands of newcomers to the world of roleplaying games. That same, great piece of fantasy art is back again as the cover of the new Red Box, and we got a companion piece to go with this month's feature adventure, "Dungeon of the Ghost Tower" by Rob Schwalb. As always, it's stunning. Thanks, Larry. It's an honor to work with you again.

Second: Unearthed Arcana.

If you haven't read this month's *Dragon* editorial, you'll want to bop over there when you're done here. I won't repeat myself, other than to say lots of people here are very excited about the possibilities opened up by a simple thing like Unearthed Arcana. The bulk of what you read in *Dragon* and *Dungeon* will still be official, sanctioned material, but every now and then, we're going to stretch the envelope a bit—or a lot.

Third: Adventures.

Many discussions have taken place here over the last year about what makes a roleplaying experience excellent as opposed to merely good. Those conversations are still going on, and will continue for—oh, a long time, I hope, because I enjoy them—but some exciting conclusions and initiatives have grown out of them. You'll see evidence of that in the Essentials line when it goes on sale. You'll see more of it here in *Dungeon*, as we begin experimenting with new (and maybe a few old) formats for adventures. That's really a topic for the future, though. I think I'll tuck that in my hip pocket for October's or November's editorial.



THE DUNGEON OF THE GHOST TOWER

By Robert J. Schwalb

illustration by Sam Burley ✦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

"The Dungeon of the Ghost Tower" is an adventure for five 2nd-level characters. It picks up from the story which began in the solo adventure presented in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Fantasy Roleplaying Game Starter Set and continued in the solo adventure "Ghost Tower of the Witchlight Fens" (available from www.wizards.com with the redemption code from the starter set) and "The Twisted Halls" adventure in the Dungeon Master's Book. While intended as the next step for new Dungeon Masters, showing the way forward into the wider world of D&D®, any group can venture into the Witchlight Fens to uncover the horrid secret that the Ghost Tower conceals. Those who survive the many perils lying in wait earn enough experience points to reach 3rd level by the adventure's end.

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Adventure Background

The Nentir River's waters tumble through the Moon Hills, running alongside Fallcrest, where they crash down onto the rocks before continuing their journey south. They twist and bend through a darkening land, a region blighted by the dreaded Witchlight Fens. The Nentir vanishes into that vast quagmire, where it joins with the White River to form the murky soup that has been known to swallow unwary travelers and to harbor vile and sinister creatures spawned from nightmare. Aside from the hardy rangers who patrol its bounds, few venture near the Fens lest they invite trouble into their lives. Though common folk know to steer clear of the Fens, this has not always been the case.

Many nobles have tried to conquer the bog, and each time their effort met failure. The last to claim these lands were the Kaltons, a noble family of dubious reputation who sought to make their home on the Fens' eastern fringes. As with many who came before, the bog coughed up horrors beyond counting to drive off the settlers and crash against the Kalton Manor's walls. Many believed that the family died out with its half-finished keep, but the truth is far more tragic.

Survivors fled the area, but they carried its taint with them. A few of these bred a reclusive, twisted family that is poisoned by the Fens' dark influence and whose members ponder death's mysteries. The last Kalton was Anarus who, by all accounts, was the worst of the lot. Beneath the sagging tower whose pale stones shine in the full moon's light, he explored the forbidden and the perverse, all with the aid of his two seemingly loyal apprentices.

"Seemingly" because Anarus met his doom on the blade of his lesser student, an outcast dwarf from Hammerfast named Traevus. For years, Traevus had resented the bond between Anarus and his other (and better) student, Malareth. Driven by hate, Traevus betrayed and killed his teacher and stole his wicked tomes. Then he fled toward the west from Nentir Vale with the books and Anarus's head as a grisly trophy. Before Traevus could find a safe haven, his rival Malareth descended on him and seized the skull for his own dark ends. Thanks to the adventuring band's brave efforts, Malareth was defeated and the skull is nearly back in Traevus's hands once more—and that may not be a good thing.

Adventure Synopsis

The adventure begins at the Ghost Tower of the Witchlight Fens (see sidebar). There, the adventurers discover a staircase winding down into the darkness. It empties out into a chamber haunted by undead. Beyond the undead lies a room guarded by a deadly trap. After dealing with the trap, the characters are free to explore the site, though it shouldn't take long before they realize that there is one place they cannot go—at least not without the key, which is scattered in pieces throughout the dungeon. Once the characters recover those pieces, they can push on to confront the ghost which haunts the final chamber.

Quests

The best way to lure the players into the plot is to use a quest relating to the prior experiences with the unfolding story. The first three quests assume that the players played through the events in "The Twisting Halls." The last does not, so it can be used as a general hook. Choose the quest that best applies and read it to the players when the characters are standing at the foot of the Ghost Tower.

The Ghost Tower

If you played the solo adventure "Ghost Tower of the Witchlight Fens," in which you helped Sareth recover her mother's stolen sword, then your character already knows a few things about this tower. During that adventure, you may have discovered the staircase that descends beneath the tower. You didn't have time then to explore further down, but you did see that the stairs continue much deeper than where you went.

You also learned that this is only one of three legendary "ghost towers." Where the others might be located, how they are linked, and what secrets they conceal is another adventure altogether ...

Recover the Anarusi Codex

After returning the skull to Traevus and receiving the reward he promised, the dwarf had a second mission for you because you performed the first one so admirably. He asked you to travel to the Witchlight Fens and recover for him a magic tome entitled *Anarusi Codex*. He claimed it was a dangerous book and feared what might happen if it fell into the wrong hands. His directions lead to the Ghost Tower.

Reward: 125 XP per adventurer and 170 gp for the group.

DARK SECRETS REVEALED

Sensing terrible magic in the skull, you opted not to hand over the relic to your employer, at least not until you figured out what he wants to do with it. Asking around Fallcrest, you learned Traevus is a stranger to the town. The few people who know him believe that he hails from someplace east of the Witchlight Fens, in particular a sinister place named the Ghost Tower. If you want to learn the truth about Traevus, the Ghost Tower seems the best place to search.

Reward: 125 XP per adventurer.

CONFIRM SUSPICIONS

You emerged from the Twisting Halls and returned to Fallcrest. There, a fiery dwarf priest named Grundelmar greeted you. Pulling you aside, he explained that the skull harbors wicked power, and he confided that Traevus is himself a necromancer who intends to perform a dread ritual somewhere near Winterhaven. The priest asked you to bring Traevus to justice and promised a reward, but it seems the merchant figured out you were on to him and fled. Tracking your erstwhile employer led you to a crumbling tower on the edge of a vast swamp. If you want to bring him to justice, you need to find him in these ruins.

Reward: 125 XP per adventurer and 170 gp for the group.

WEIRD LIGHTS ON THE MOOR

Travelers from the south reported seeing strange sights in the Witchlight Fens, including weird lights, oddly shuffling figures in the mist, and so on. Foremost of these tales was the Ghost Tower, so named because it shines in the moonlight. There might be plunder in that place and wonders buried in the ruins haunting that land. The only way to find out is to go there and have a look.

Reward: 125 XP per adventurer.

TREASURE

The characters should find four magic items and accumulate the equivalent of 1,040 gp over the course of the adventure. Treasure rewards are described at the end of each encounter. Magic items are similarly assigned. If you find a magic item isn't suited for any of your player characters, swap out that item for another of the same level.

PREPARING THE ADVENTURE

Being familiar with the adventure and the encounters it contains is the best way to start. You don't need to memorize everything that will take place, but take the time to review the information, skim encounters, familiarize yourself with monsters, and review the magic items to make sure they are appropriate for your group.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Tell the players their quest and start the adventure at the point where the heroes reach the Ghost Tower. The characters can then enter the dungeon, explore its locations, and defeat the enemies lurking within. When you're ready to begin, proceed with Encounter 1.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure ends when the characters complete their major quest, usually achieved by defeating the ghost of Anarus Kalton in the dungeon's bowels. What happens next depends on the quest.

Recover the *Anarusi Codex:* The characters have the tome in hand. If they weren't suspicious before, the tome should definitely nudge them closer to questioning their employer's motives. A sinister black book filled with mad ravings about necromancy and dark magic is enough to give anyone pause. Will the characters hand over the tome? Will they destroy it? Will they confront their master?

Dark Secrets Revealed: The characters learn the truth about Traevus from Anarus Kalton. Will Traevus be waiting for the heroes when they return? Or will he have fled to Winterhaven or someplace beyond it?

Confirm Suspicions: The characters confront Traevus in the dungeon below the Ghost Tower and learn his whole, sorry tale (see below). Do the characters believe him? Will they help him? Or do they drag him back to Fallcrest to face certain justice at Grundelmar's hands?

Weird Lights on the Moor: The heroes vanquish the evil which dwells in the Ghost Tower's ruins and recover the blasphemous *Anarusi Codex*. What will the heroes do with such a wicked tome? What horrors does it contain? Are others interested in acquiring the pages between its blackened covers?

Expanding the Adventure

You can expand this adventure in several ways.

Long Introduction: Each quest contains a summary of those events that led the characters to the Ghost Tower. You can easily roleplay through these scenarios to hook the players in a more organic fashion. Doing so helps the players develop their characters' personalities while also giving them the chance to further explore Fallcrest.

A Dangerous Journey: The adventure assumes that the characters find no trouble as they make their way to the Witchlight Fens, but this short journey is a great opportunity for you to try your hand at building encounters. It also gives the players a chance to test new powers before entering the dungeon. Design a level 2 encounter with a good assortment of monster roles and spring it on the characters at some point during the trip.

More Encounters: Although the characters can reach 3rd level by the adventure's conclusion, you might add additional encounters to the dungeon by adding passages that lead to other locations. A kobold band could claim a new section and fight a losing battle against interloping goblins, for example. Or, the pit in encounter area 4 might lead to even deeper, more dangerous caverns beneath this level of the dungeon. Remember that the more combat encounters you add, the harder the adventure becomes. Don't stretch the characters' resources too far at this stage of their careers.

Stopping to Rest

The dungeon's inhabitants have resided here for some time and they seldom return to the surface, so the characters can retreat up to the ruined tower and rest when they need to. You should describe this time as being filled with weird cries and strange noises echoing through the mist. If the characters rely on extended rests too often and seldom take any risks, something from the Fens might crawl out of the bog to investigate all the activity in the tower. Consider running the following encounter after the adventurers take their second extended rest.

Witchlight Raiders

Level 2 Encounter (625 XP)

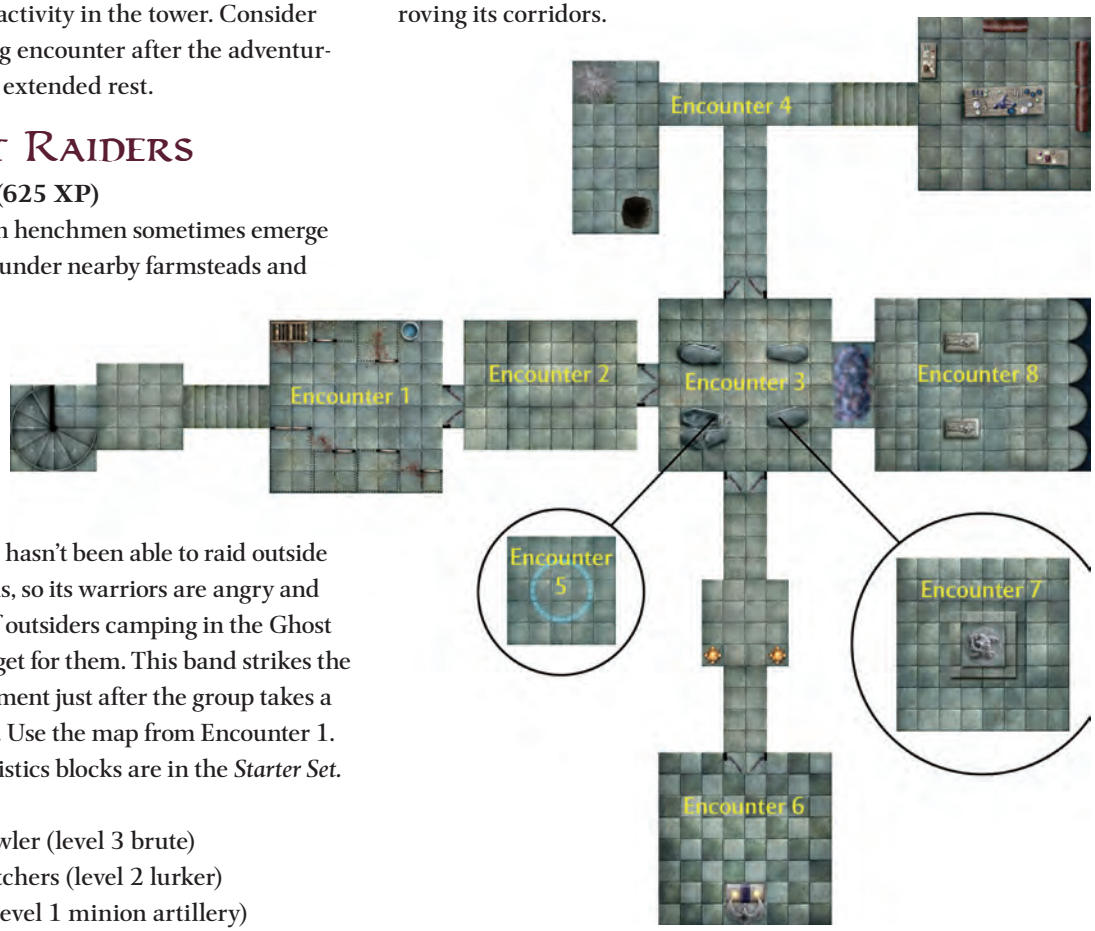
Lizardfolk with goblin henchmen sometimes emerge from the swamp to plunder nearby farmsteads and hamlets for food, prisoners, and treasure. The rangers who patrol the edge of the swamp keep most of these raiders at bay.

The poisonscale tribe hasn't been able to raid outside the swamp for months, so its warriors are angry and frustrated. A group of outsiders camping in the Ghost Tower is a perfect target for them. This band strikes the adventurers' encampment just after the group takes a second extended rest. Use the map from Encounter 1. All the creatures' statistics blocks are in the *Starter Set.*

- 1 poisonscale brawler (level 3 brute)
- 3 poisonscale snatchers (level 2 lurker)
- 4 goblin snipers (level 1 minion artillery)

Dungeon Overview

The Ghost Tower is the only intact structure remaining from Kalton Manor, and even it is a hollow shell. Below the ruin, however, is a dungeon complex used by the misanthropic Kaltons, who refused to yield their territory to the monsters spilling out from the Fens. The chambers below are described in the encounters that follow. They testify to the profane magic used here in the form of shuffling undead roving its corridors.



Four Keys

Anarus long suspected treachery from his apprentices. He was certain they would betray him yet he wasn't prepared when they did, so that Traevus got the better of him in the end. Before his death, Anarus took steps to safeguard his most prized possessions, the *Anarasi Codex* in particular, against his apprentices. Using dark magic, Anarus created a potent magical lock called a *ward* to seal his inner sanctum. Access to the chamber could be gained only by assembling four magic keys into a gateway that would break the ward. Anarus scattered the keys through the dungeon and set traps and guardians to watch over them, but before he could hide the final one, Traevus killed him in his study.

Each key is a bluish-gray bar about 6 inches long and flattened into a rounded disc at one end. Touching any one of the four pieces to any other causes them to link together at a 90-degree angle, so that all four together form a rectangle. When the assembled key is held in front of the portal, it hangs in space, then enlarges to become 20 feet wide and 10 feet high. It remains open until removed, at which point it falls into pieces once more.

Traevus

The "Confirm Suspicions" quest has the characters tracking down Traevus. He is most likely in the dungeon hunting for the keys. Add Traevus to whatever encounter you like. He might join the other enemies in the combat. The adventurers might try talking to Traevus to learn what he's up to, and they might even gain his help. You can also use Traevus after or before the adventure, depending on the choices the players make.

Traevus is indeed a necromancer. He studied under Anarus for many years. He didn't learn purely to gain power, but rather to find a way to free his brother's imprisoned soul. He suspects it lies in the Shadowfell, beyond a lost gate somewhere to the west near Winterhaven. The necromancer refused to teach Traevus the lore he sought, so Traevus murdered his master and turned to less conventional methods to gain the information he needs.

When confronted, and if given the chance, Traevus explains his true motives and what he intends, although he won't mention killing Anarus. He asks the adventurers for help, knowing the ritual he seeks is contained in the *Anarusi Codex* hidden somewhere in this dungeon. If the heroes agree, Traevus accompanies them through the dungeon, lending aid in combat but generally staying out of the heroes' way when it comes to recovering the keys.

Just because Traevus is acting to rescue his brother doesn't mean that he's a good guy or a trustworthy ally. He has already lied to the characters at least once and murdered his teacher. Don't forget that, even if the players do. The fact of the murder is likely to be revealed when Anarus is encountered, and Traevus can't afford to have that secret spread back to civilization.

Traevus **Level 3 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf XP 150

HP 43; **Bloodied** 21 **Initiative** +1
AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15 **Perception** +4
Speed 5 Low-light vision
Resist 6 necrotic

Traits

☼ **Death Master** ✦ **Aura** 5
All undead allies within the aura gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls and resist 5 radiant.

Stand the Ground
Traevus can move 1 square less than the effect specifies when subjected to a pull, push, or slide.

Steady-Footed
Traevus can make a saving throw to avoid falling prone when an attack would knock him prone.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Handaxe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 1 damage.

⊛ **Shadow Claw** (implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and Traevus slides the target up to 2 squares.

⊹ **Decaying Whisper** (implement, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).

✣ **Swarming Claws** (implement, necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The burst becomes a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter. Squares within the zone are difficult terrain. Any enemy that starts its turn within the zone takes 5 damage.

Skills Arcana +9, Bluff +6, Intimidate +6, Religion +9

Str 12 (+2)	**Dex** 11 (+1)	**Wis** 16 (+4)
Con 11 (+1)	**Int** 16 (+4)	**Cha** 11 (+1)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Equipment fine clothing, handaxe, dagger

Encounter 1: Dark Stairs

Encounter Level 2 (700 XP)

Setup

7 grasping zombies (Z)

A staircase in the ruined Ghost Tower spirals down until it ends in an antechamber. Beyond, a second staircase descends into a dungeon. Although designed to hold prisoners, the dungeon also allowed the more sinister Kaltons to use captives for their terrible experiments.

When the adventurers reach the bottom of the first staircase, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

Decay chokes the air in the modest antechamber. Across it, a dark passage reveals another staircase going down. You glimpse glowing pinpricks in the gloom ahead and a faint shuffling noise that grows louder. Now you see that those dots of light are the faintly glowing eye sockets of horrid, rotting zombies with blackened claws.

Two grasping zombies come to investigate the heroes' light source. Place them where indicated, roll initiative for the zombies, and record the players' initiative scores.

When the adventurers reach the bottom of the second staircase, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

The second staircase opens into a large chamber filled with rusting cages. A basin holds brackish water in one corner, and a bloodstained grate serves as a drain in another. Double doors stand closed opposite the staircase.

Tactics

The zombies are nearly mindless, so it takes them a few moments to organize into a fighting force. Each round after the first, two more zombies climb the stairs until all seven have joined the fight. If a character moves into the lower chamber during this fight, all the remaining zombies that haven't come up the stairs are waiting there and they attack at once.

The zombies attack the nearest enemy each round, using *zombie grasp* to hold their opponents in place and then using *slam* against targets they are grabbing.

Features of the Area

Illumination: These rooms are dark.

Stairs: Squares containing stairs are difficult terrain.

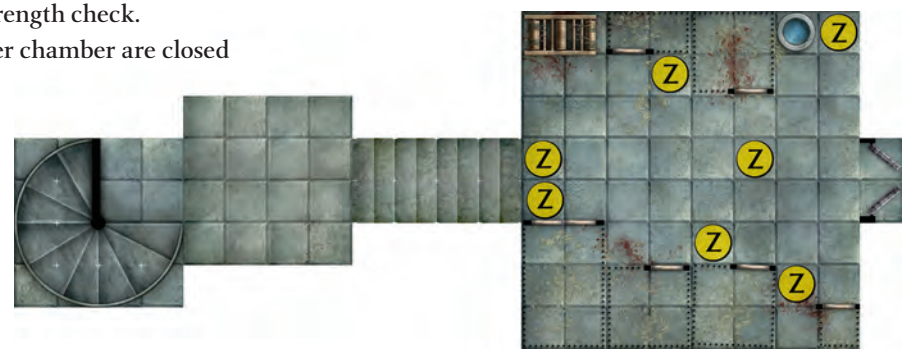
Basin: The water in the basins is foul and toxic. Any living creature that drinks the water takes 5 necrotic damage.

Bloody Grate: Hatred and violence infuse the blood staining the grate and the stones around it. Any creature standing in or adjacent to a square containing the bloody grate can score a critical hit on a 19 or 20.

Cages: The doors to the cages are unlocked, but they are rusted shut. Opening a door requires a minor action and a successful DC 9 Strength check.

Doors: The doors in the lower chamber are closed and not locked.

7 Grasping Zombies (Z) Medium natural animate (undead)			**Level 1 Brute** XP 100 each
HP 33; **Bloodied** 16			**Initiative** -1
AC 13, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11			**Perception** -1
Speed 4			Darkvision
Immune disease, poison			
Traits			
Zombie Weakness			
A critical hit automatically reduces the zombie to 0 hit points.			
Standard Actions			
⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC			
Hit: 1d12 + 3 damage, or 1d12 + 8 against a grabbed target.			
⸸ **Zombie Grasp** ✦ **At-Will**			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +4 vs. Reflex			
Hit: The zombie grabs the target (escape DC 12) if it does not have a creature grabbed.			
Triggered Actions			
Deathless Hunger ✦ **Encounter**			
Trigger: The zombie is reduced to 0 hit points, but not by a critical hit.			
Effect (No Action): Roll a d20. On a 15 or higher, the zombie is instead reduced to 1 hit point.			
Skills Arcana +9, Bluff +6, Intimidate +6, Religion +9			
Str 16 (+3)	**Dex** 8 (-1)	**Wis** 8 (-1)	
Con 13 (+1)	**Int** 1 (-5)	**Cha** 3 (-4)	
Alignment unaligned	**Languages** Common, Dwarven		



Encounter 2: Blades of Death

Encounter Level 1 (350 XP)

Setup

Scything blades

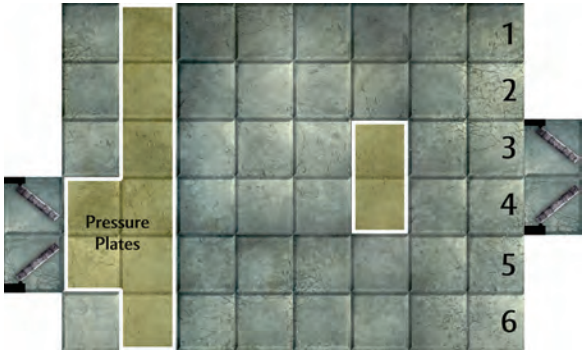
This chamber contains a deadly trap which demonstrates the lengths to which Anarus Kalton went to safeguard his private sanctum.

When the adventurers open the western doors, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

A plain stone room stretches ahead. Double doors, wooden and reinforced with iron bands, stand opposite the ones you just opened. All is still. All is quiet.

Have the players position their tokens near the entrance to the chamber and then compare their passive Perception to the Perception DCs described below. Give them the information they receive for their check result plus all lower results.

The adventurers trigger the trap when one enters a pressure plate square indicated on the tactical map. Be sure to have the players show you where they are moving exactly so you know whether they trigger the trap. Once a character triggers the trap, have everyone roll initiative.



Perception Check

DC 11: A character notices thin, shallow cuts running across the dungeon floor at 5-foot intervals.

DC 15: The character notices thin slots across the room's ceiling, corresponding with the cuts across the floor.

DC 23: The character notices a strange stone panel adjacent to the double doors on the opposite side.

Tactics

See the trap's description for information on how it works. To defeat the trap, the characters must either disable it or destroy it using the countermeasures described above.

Features of the Area

Control Panel: The control panel for the trap is on the wall at the far end of blade row 2.

Illumination: This room is dark.

Eastern Doors: The doors on the east wall are locked. The doors unlock when all the scything blades are disabled or destroyed. Alternatively, a character can break down the door with a DC 19 Strength check.

Scything Blades Object	**Level 4 Trap** XP 350
Detect Perception DC 21	**Initiative** special
Immune all damage, forced movement, all conditions	

Traits

Unpredictable Scythes

The trap acts on initiative counts 24, 14, and 4, using one standard action per turn. On each of Its turns, the trap attacks one row of squares. Roll a d6 to determine which row it attacks; match the die result with the numbers shown on the map. The trap makes an attack against each creature in the row's squares.

Standard Actions

⸸ Scythe Attack ✦ At-Will

Effect: Before the attack, roll a d6. The result determines which row the trap attacks.

Attack: Melee (all creatures in a row of squares); +11 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, the trap pushes the target 1 square, knocks the target prone, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Countermeasures

✦ **Predict:** Dungeoneering DC 21 (minor action). *Success:* If the character is in a row the trap would attack, the character can shift 1 square as an immediate reaction.

✦ **Disable:** Thievery DC 21 (standard action). *Success:* The character disables one scything blade (roll a d6 to see which one) at the control panel. When you roll to determine the row the trap attacks and you get a result corresponding to a disabled blade, the trap does not attack for that turn. When all blades are disabled, the trap is destroyed. *Failure (16 or less):* A scything blade attacks a random row.

✦ **Destroy:** AC 15, Fortitude 12, Reflex 12, 48 hp per blade. To attack a blade, a character must ready an action to attack a scything blade as it passes through his or her square or an adjacent square. *Success:* Dropping a blade to 0 hit points destroys the blade. When you roll to determine the row the trap attacks and you get a result corresponding to a destroyed blade, the trap does not attack for that turn.

Encounter 3: Tombs

Encounter Level 2 (625 XP)

Setup

1 shadowhunter bat (B)
2 skeletons (S)
7 decrepit skeletons (D)

This chamber was where the Kalton family interred their important dead. Anarus Kalton animated several skeletons to stand guard against tomb robbers. Now those undead linger, waiting to serve the purpose for which they were made.

When the adventurers enter this room, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

This musty chamber contains four sarcophagi. Doors lead out to the north and south, while billowing violet mist swirls in the center of the far wall. Bones lie in heaps around the room, mixed with blades and bows. A clattering noise reveals that these aren't ordinary bones, and that is confirmed when they rise up as one, brandishing pitted and notched weapons.

Place the skeleton tokens on the map where indicated. Be sure to tell the players that the decrepit skeletons are in poor shape and probably wouldn't survive a single hit. Don't place the bat until it attacks or until the characters detect it. Then roll initiative for the monsters and record the characters' initiative scores.

When the shadowhunter bat attacks, read the text aloud:

What at first looked like a shadow pulls free from the ceiling and flutters toward you, a long barbed tail trailing.

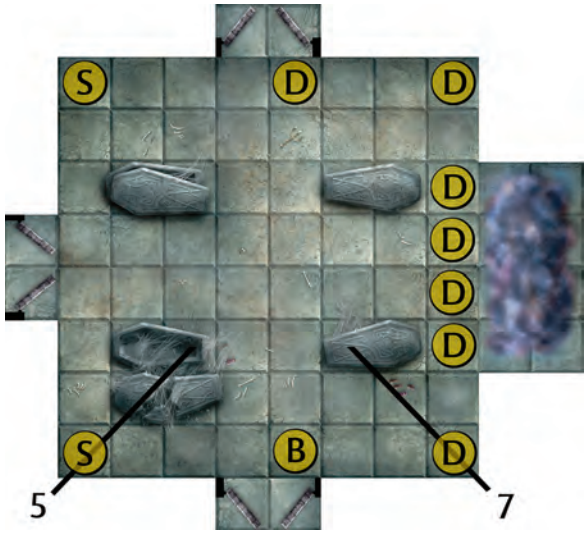
Perception Check

DC 20: The character notices the shadowhunter bat cloaked in the ceiling's darkness.

Shadowhunter Bat (B)	**Level 3 Lurker**
Medium shadow magical beast	XP 150
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19	**Initiative** +9
AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 12	**Perception** +7
Speed 2 (clumsy), fly 8	Darkvision
Standard Actions	
(+) **Tail Slash** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage. In dim light or darkness, a shadowhunter bat gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals 6 extra damage.	
Flyby Attack ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The shadowhunter bat flies up to 8 squares and makes one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The bat doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of the attack.	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 13 (+2) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 13 (+2)	
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 2 (-3) **Cha** 11 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

2 Skeletons (S)	**Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 150 each
HP 45; **Bloodied** 22	**Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +3
Speed 6	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Traits	
Speed of the Dead	
When making an opportunity attack, a skeleton gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals 1d6 extra damage.	
Standard Actions	
(+) **Longsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the skeleton's next turn.	
Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+3)	
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 3 (-3)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	
Equipment longsword	

7 Decrepit Skeletons (D)	**Level 1 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 25 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +3	
AC 16, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Standard Actions	
(+) **Longsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The skeleton shifts 1 square before making its attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
Shortbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The skeleton shifts 1 square before making its attack.	
Attack: Ranged 15/30 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
Str 15 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+2)	
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 3 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	
Equipment longsword, shortbow, 20 arrows	



Tactics

The undead waste no time before attacking the intruders. The two skeletons take positions on either side of the door, so any character passing by faces their deadly opportunity attacks. The skeletons attack the nearest enemy each round.

The decrepit skeletons hang back and pepper the heroes with *shortbow* attacks, adjusting their positions each time to get the best angle on their attacks and keeping the sarcophagi between them and the characters. The decrepit skeletons target characters carrying light sources, but they defend themselves if threatened by shifting and shooting each time.

Finally, the shadowhunter bat uses *flyby attack* to strike at characters on the periphery, especially if they are in dim light or darkness where it excels.

Features of the Area

Illumination: This room is dark.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet overhead.

Sarcophagi: Four sarcophagi stand in this chamber. A sarcophagus grants cover to creatures standing behind it, and squares in its space count as difficult terrain. An adjacent character can push the lid off with a DC 15 Athletics check.

A carving on the sarcophagus at the top right depicts a scowling man dressed in plate armor. His hands rest on the pommel of a longsword whose blade extends the length of his body. An inscription on the cartouche identifies the man as Arrol Kalton. Inside this sarcophagus is the body of Arrol Kalton along with a *+1 frost longsword* and a golden circlet worth 90 gp. Prying the sword from his deathgrip requires a DC 9 Strength check.

Carvings on the top left sarcophagus display a proud, regal woman in chainmail and equipped with a shield and mace. A sunburst on the shield suggests she might have been a paladin in service to Pelor. The cartouche shows her name as Alana Kalton. Inside this sarcophagus are the remains of Alana Kalton but nothing of value.

The bottom right sarcophagus features an androgynous figure carved on the lid, hairless and with no distinguishing features. Scrawled in red paint is the message, "Anarus Kalton—burn in the Nine Hells." The sarcophagus itself is empty, but from its bottom, a narrow shaft with a rickety ladder extends 20 feet down to Encounter 7. As characters climb down or up the ladder, have each make a DC 9 Acrobatics check at the midpoint of the ladder. Anyone who fails feels the ladder shifting and cracking because of their movement. If anyone fails by 5 or more (rolling an adjusted result of 4 or less), the ladder collapses and dumps them into the chamber below; they take 1d10 damage from the fall (remember that characters trained in Acrobatics can reduce falling damage). If the ladder crumbles this way, characters need to use a rope or Athletics skill to climb up or down through the shaft from then on.

The lid on the bottom left sarcophagus is broken and lying on the floor. It is empty except for a narrow shaft with a ladder that descends into darkness to Encounter 5. Have characters make the same Acrobatics check when descending or climbing this ladder, but it only shakes and cracks; it won't break.

Doors: The doors on the north and south walls are wooden and banded with iron. They are closed and unlocked but very heavy. A DC 13 Athletics check is needed to open them.

Violet Mist: Billowing violet mist covers a section of the eastern wall. Any character entering the mist reappears in the last square he or she occupied, having been turned around by the magical atmosphere. A DC 10 Arcana check made while studying the mist reveals it is magical and is a barrier of some kind. Success by 5 or more reveals that the barrier can be bypassed with a special magic key (see "Four Keys" above). Success by 10 or more reveals that the characters cannot move through the mist until they collect all four key parts, assemble them, and place the key in the mist to form a portal through the barrier. A character who succeeds on the check also recognizes the metal rods as components of the key.

Encounter 4: Rats!

Encounter Level 4 (950 XP)

Setup

2 deathjump spiders (S)
2 scurrying rat swarms (R)
4 dire rats (D)

Anarus studied and experimented with dark magic in these two chambers. The western chamber was where he once practiced his spells, while the eastern chamber was where he examined his once-priceless manuscripts. Since his murder, rats have made nests from the pages and bookworms have made short work of the tomes. To make matters worse, two loathsome spiders have crept up from the Underdark through the hole in the western room's floor.

Depending on the order in which the characters enter these rooms, you might need to modify the following text.

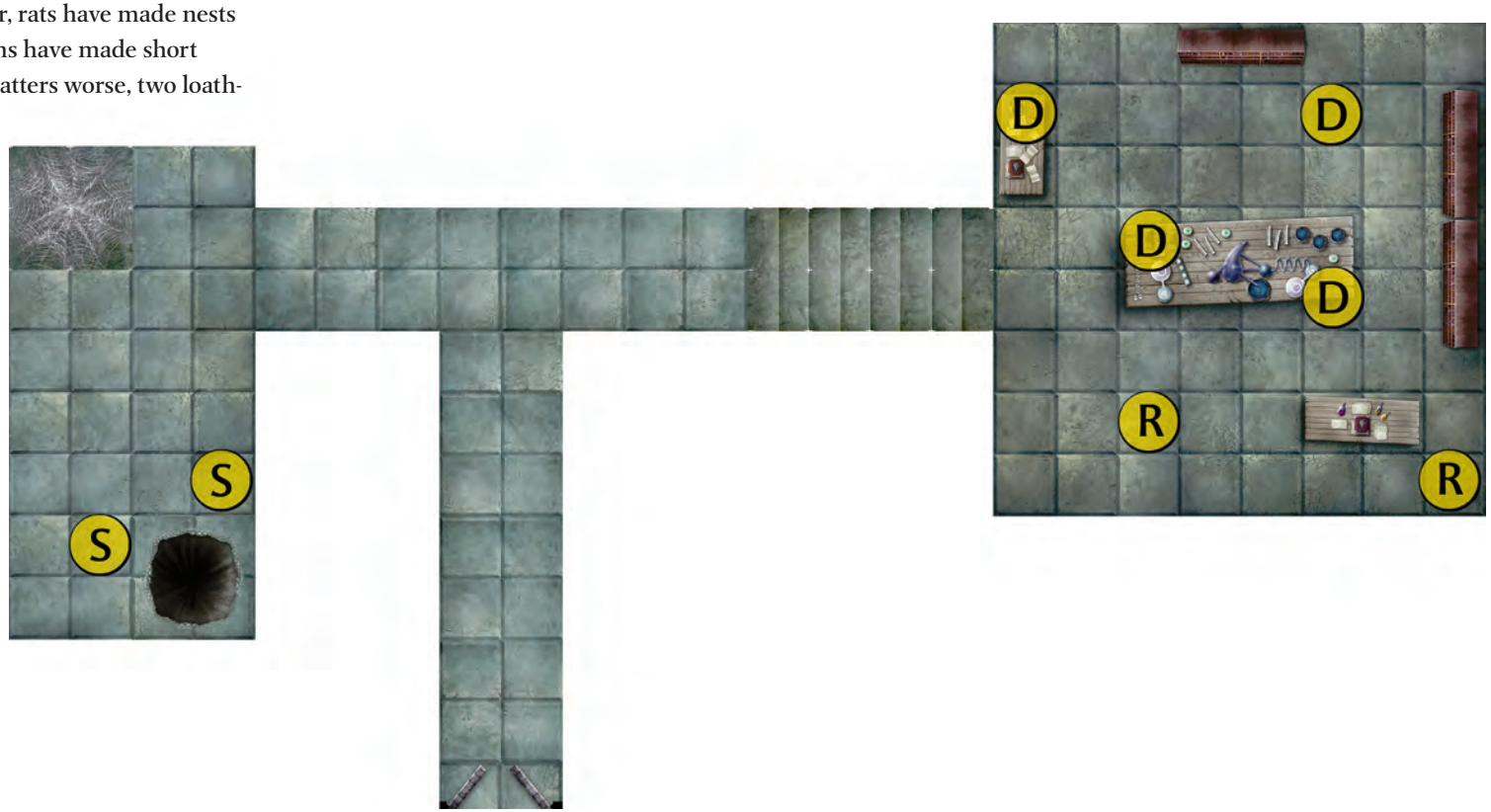
When the adventurers enter the eastern room, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

The stairs open into a square chamber containing several tables and two bookshelves laden with rotting books and scrolls. Rats stand on the tables and scurry across the floor. These large, aggressive rats immediately cease what they're doing and turn their black, glinting eyes toward you.

When the adventurers enter the western room, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

At the short passage's end, you spot a pile of rubble and bones. The rest of the room opens up to the south, where you see two pony-sized spiders crouching on the floor. Their black carapaces glitter in your light. Behind them yawns a deep pit.

Place tokens only for those monsters the characters can see. Then, roll initiative for all the monsters and record their and the characters' results.



2 Deathjump Spiders (S)	Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast (spider)	XP 175 each
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26	**Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +7
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Tremorsense 5
Resist 10 poison	
Traits	
Soft Fall	
The spider ignores the first 30 feet when determining damage from a fall.	
Web Walk	
The spider ignores difficult terrain composed of webs.	
Standard Actions	
Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).	
Death from Above ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃	
Effect: The spider jumps 6 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. It then makes a melee basic attack. On a hit, the spider deals 1d6 extra damage and the target falls prone.	
Move Actions	
Prodigious Leap ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The spider jumps 10 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +8	
Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+2)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

2 Scurrying Rat Swarms (R)	Level 1 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast (swarm)	XP 100 each
HP 27; **Bloodied** 13	**Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 11	**Perception** +4
Speed 6, climb 2	Low-light vision
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 against close and area attacks	
Traits	
Swarm Attack ✦ **Aura** 1	
Any enemy that begins its turn within the aura takes 4 damage, and the swarm slides it 1 square.	
Swarm	
The swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures it comprises.	
Standard Actions	
Swarm of Teeth ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 3 damage, or 1d10 + 8 if the swarm moved at least 2 squares this turn.	
Effect: The swarm shifts 1 square.	
Skills Stealth +8	
Str 12 (+1) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 9 (-1)	
Con 11 (+0) **Int** 1 (-5) **Cha** 7 (-2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

4 Dire Rats (D)	Level 1 Brute
Medium natural beast	XP 100 each
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19	**Initiative** +2
AC 13, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 9	**Perception** +5
Speed 6, climb 3	Low-light vision
Immune filth fever	
Standard Actions	
Slam (disease) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the target is exposed to filth fever.	
Skills Stealth +7	
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 15 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+0)	
Con 18 (+4) **Int** 2 (-4) **Cha** 6 (-2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Tactics

Cautious and quiet characters might need to deal with only one group of monsters at a time. If the spiders are not involved in the combat initially, they should make a DC 12 Perception check to hear the sound of fighting. The DC might be higher if the characters take precautions (such as making Stealth checks to conceal their sounds, in which case the DC equals the lowest Stealth check result).

The deathjump spiders are ravenous and this shows in their tactics. They have tremorsense, so they can detect invisible enemies within 5 squares. They can also see normally in any light. When a spider locates an enemy, it uses *death from above* to engage that enemy and focuses its attack against that enemy thereafter. If a spider becomes surrounded, it attacks and then uses *prodigious leap* to escape.

The rats are hungry as well, but they do not leave their room because they fear the spiders. The dire rats work in pairs against the nearest enemies, using *bite* each round. The scurrying rats keep moving so their attacks deal extra damage, even if doing so would provoke opportunity attacks. They flow through the characters, using *swarm of teeth* against anyone in their path.

Features of the Area

Illumination: All areas are dark.

Ceiling: The ceilings are 20 feet overhead.

Pit: The spiders emerged from the pit in the western room. The pit drops 30 feet into a natural cavern. A creature that falls takes 3d10 damage on landing. Climbing out of the pit requires a DC 10 Athletics check. The cavern isn't part of this adventure, but if you want to expand the adventure, this would be a good place to start.

Rubble: Debris chokes the western chamber's northwestern corner. Hidden (DC 10 Perception check) in the rubble and bones is a *potion of healing*, 5 gp, and 50 sp.

Stairs: A steep staircase leads down to the eastern chamber. Staircase squares are difficult terrain.

Tables: Several tables occupy the eastern room. They each hold rat droppings, gnawed papers long since rendered impossible to read, a few paperweights, and assorted junk. On the central table, however, is one *magic key* (see "Four Keys" above) lying in a pool of dried blood. There is also a *+1 orb of sanguinary repercussions*.

Shelves: Two bookshelves stand against the walls of the eastern room. They are filled with an odd assortment of moldering books. Any character who opens a book finds several pale bookworms grown fat on the abundant fare. Subjects covered deal with necromancy, anatomy, and treatises on the demon prince Orcus. All are in such bad condition that not even the most foolish collector would buy one.

Dire Rat Filth Fever — **Level 1 Disease**

Those infected by this disease waste away as they alternately suffer chills and hot flashes.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target loses a healing surge.
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target loses a healing surge. The target also takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex.
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target loses all healing surges and cannot regain hit points.
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.
7 or lower: The stage of the disease increases by one.
8–11: No change.
12 or higher: The stage of the disease decreases by one.

Filth Fever

The dire rats carry filth fever and when they hit a character with their *bite* attack, they expose their target to the disease. At the end of the encounter, each exposed character must make a saving throw. A character who fails this saving throw becomes infected with filth fever.

An infected character suffers the initial effect of the disease. After each extended rest, the character makes an Endurance check. If the character scores a 12 or better, his or her condition improves by one stage, but if the result is 7 or worse, the character's condition worsens by one stage. If the result is 8 to 11, the character's condition doesn't change that day.

A character who reaches the top stage is cured and can stop making Endurance checks. If a character reaches the bottom stage (the final state), he or she can no longer improve without the use of magic, such as a special ritual designed to cure afflictions.

An ally can use the Heal skill in place of the infected character's Endurance check.

Encounter 5: Claiming the Key

Encounter Level 1 (400 XP)

Refusing to surrender his achievements to his less worthy students, Anarus secured his keys behind magic traps and deadly guardians.

When the characters drop down into this chamber, place the appropriate tile and read the following text aloud:

Soft blue light emanates from a glowing ring set in the floor's center. Flecks in the walls catch and reflect the light. In the ring's center hovers a small, blue bar that is flattened at one end.

Claiming the key is a skill challenge, so the characters must rely on skill checks rather than swords and spells to overcome this encounter. Let the players

ask questions about the room, the circle, and other hidden features. Ask for skill checks when they investigate pertinent features or try things that could work, until they either make six successful skill checks, thus gaining the key, or they fail three skill checks, which causes the circle to summon two wraiths. If the characters defeat the wraiths, the circle's power ends and the heroes gain the key.

Ensnaring Circle	**Level 5 Trap**
Object	XP –

Detect Perception DC 0

Immune all damage, forced movement, all conditions

Triggered Actions

⊕ **Attack** (necrotic, teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**

Trigger: A creature enters the circle or reaches into the magic circle.

Effect: Melee 1 (the triggering creature); the creature teleports to an unoccupied square within the magic circle. The creature is then restrained and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both). The characters earn 1 failure toward the skill challenge.

Aftereffect: The creature teleports to the nearest unoccupied square outside the ensnaring circle's space.

Countermeasures

✦ **Bypass:** See "Bypassing the Circle." *Success:* If a character succeeds in entering the circle, he or she can take the key. *Failure:* See "Bypassing the Circle" for how a character can fail.

✦ **Dismantle:** Arcana or Thievery DC 17 (standard action). *Requirement:* See "Dismantling the Circle." *Success:* Gain 1 success on the skill challenge. *Failure (16 or less):* The character who fails the check takes 5 necrotic damage and the effort counts as a failure for the skill challenge.

2 Wraiths	**Level 5 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid	XP 200 each

HP 53; **Bloodied** 26 — **Initiative** +10

AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +2

Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing — Darkvision

Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic

Traits

Insubstantial

The wraith takes half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force damage. Whenever the wraith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the start of its next turn.

Spawn Wraith

When the wraith kills a humanoid, that humanoid becomes a wraith figment at the start of this wraith's next turn. The new wraith appears in the space where the humanoid died or in the nearest unoccupied square, and it rolls a new initiative check. The new wraith acts under the Dungeon Master's control.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Shadow Touch** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + 6 necrotic damage, or 4d6 + 14 necrotic damage if the wraith was invisible to the target when it attacked.

Triggered Actions

Shadow Glide (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**

Trigger: An attack that does not deal force or radiant damage hits the wraith.

Effect (Free Action): The wraith becomes invisible until it hits or misses with an attack or until the end of the encounter. The wraith teleports up to 6 squares and cannot attack until the end of its next turn.

Skills Stealth +11

Str 4 (-1)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 17 (+5)	**Int** 6 (+0)	**Cha** 15 (+4)

Alignment chaotic evil — **Languages** Common

Challenge Strategies

The characters have several avenues by which they can acquire the key, as described below.

Bypassing the Circle The readaloud text offers a clue to help the heroes defeat the circle; the stone in the walls was quarried from the Shadowfell. Several blocks are hollowed out and contain a magical gas that causes a creature to become smoky and insubstantial. In such a state, a character could slip through the ward, snatch the key, and retreat.

- Any character who examines the wall and succeeds on a DC 12 Perception check discovers a few unusual stone blocks.
- Once the blocks have been spotted, a character can make a DC 17 Dungeoneering check to identify the stones as hailing not from this world and also to recognize that the stones are in fact hollow.
- Pulling a hollow stone from the wall requires a DC 12 Athletics check.
- Cracking open the freed stone requires a DC 17 Athletics check (using a weapon or tool grants a +5 bonus to this check). Breaking the stone open releases a strange black gas.
- A DC 17 Arcana or Dungeoneering check allows a character to recognize the gas's properties and its use in bypassing the circle.
- Any character who enters the gas-filled space (the gas disperses at the end of the round) gains insubstantial and phasing until the end of his next turn. Such a character can then rush through the circle, snatch the key, and return with a successful DC 17 Acrobatics check. If the check fails, the circle attacks the character as described above.

Dismantling the Circle The circle itself offers some promise in reaching the key.

- A character that succeeds on a DC 12 Arcana check learns the ensnaring circle's properties and attacks. The check also reveals that there is some connection between the circle and the Shadowfell. Success by 5 or more grants a +2 bonus on all further skill checks made to dismantle the circle.
- A second Arcana check against a DC 17 (or success by 10 or more on the first check) grants an extra success and also reveals that the shining runes can be manipulated magically (using Arcana) or physically (using Thievery).
- Once the characters gain the first success from Arcana, any character can make a DC 17 Religion check. A successful check doesn't grant a success in the skill challenge, but it does reveal what happens if they fail to breach the circle (two wraiths will appear and attack).
- Once the characters gain two successes from Arcana, they can begin the work of dismantling the ensnaring circle. A character can do so by making Arcana or Thievery checks (DC 17). Each successful check applies a success toward the skill challenge, while each failure counts as a failure in the skill challenge and deals 5 necrotic damage to the character who failed the check.

Grabbing the Key The most obvious route is to reach in and snatch the key. Doing so triggers the ensnaring circle's attack (see above). The ensnaring circle attacks whether the character reaches in with his or her hand or a tool.

Jumping the Circle The light from the magic circle extends from floor to ceiling, so jumping or flying triggers the circle's attack.

Teleportation Because the characters have line of sight to the circle's interior, they might think teleportation will do the trick. A character can use a power such as *fey step* to appear inside the circle, but the ensnaring circle makes an attack as soon as the character enters the destination square.

Throwing an Object A character might try to dislodge the key by throwing something into the circle. The character can make a ranged basic attack against the key. It has AC 15, other defenses 12, and is immune to all damage. Each hit grants 1 success and 1 failure. After each attack, inform the players that the magic circle changes color as indicated in "Success and Failure" below.

Success and Failure

If the characters succeed on the skill challenge, they fetch the key and receive 400 XP for completing the skill challenge. Failed skill checks cause the ensnaring circle to change color, becoming purple, then red, and finally black when the wraiths appear. If the heroes fail the skill challenge, the only way to get the key is to defeat the two wraiths, who are themselves rather powerful.

The wraiths fight to the death, but do not pursue characters who leave this room. If the characters flee and then return, they find the wraiths waiting for them.

Encounter 6: Hall of Stone Warriors

Encounter Level 1 (500 XP)

Setup

20 stone warriors (W)

A magic key rests in the bottom chamber. Between it and the adventurers, however, is a veritable army of stone warriors.

When the adventurers enter the area, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

The short corridor opens into an antechamber lit by two burning braziers which fill the room with thick, noxious smoke. Frescoes on the walls depict a great slaughter.

The frescoes are the only warning the heroes will receive before having to face the stone warriors in the room beyond.

When the adventurers enter the chamber, place the appropriate tiles and tokens. Then read the following text aloud:

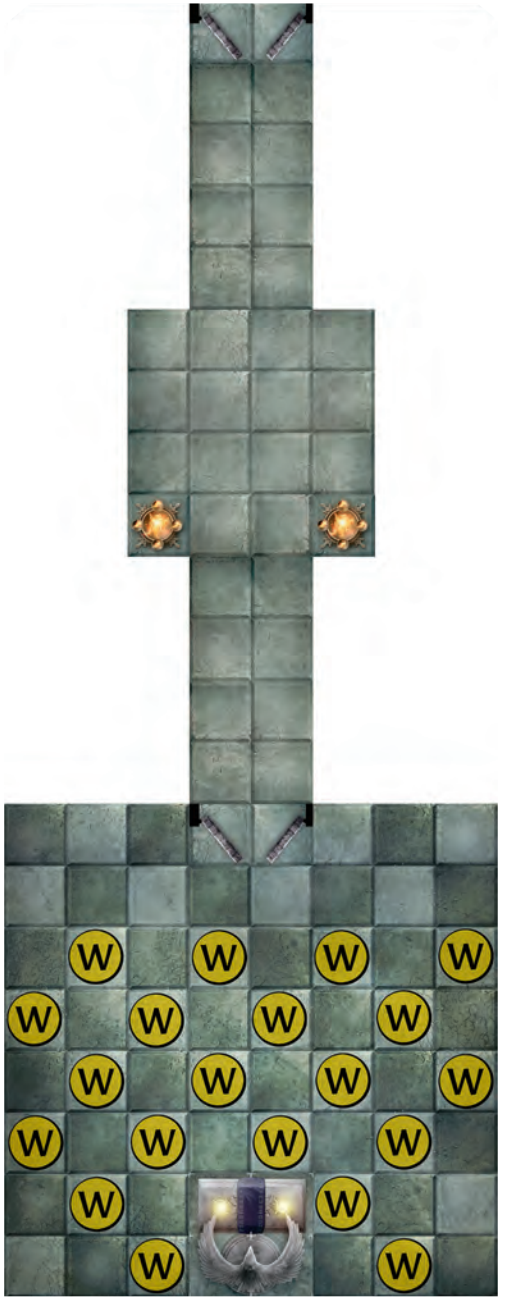
A large chamber opens before you. Standing at attention are some twenty statues, each carved to depict a fearsome bugbear warrior. Behind them stands a hideous statue depicting some kind of beaked and winged demon.

Go ahead and call for initiative from the players while rolling initiative for the stone warriors.

Perception Check

DC 11: The character spots the magic key resting between the demon statue's feet.

20 Stone Warriors (W)	**Level 1 Minion Brute**
Medium natural animate (construct)	XP 25 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** -2
AC 13, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 10, **Will** 12	**Perception** +0
Speed 5 (cannot shift)	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
Traits	
Dormant	
A stone warrior becomes dormant whenever it starts its turn adjacent to no enemies. While dormant, the stone warrior can't take standard, move, or minor actions and is immune to necrotic, poison, and psychic damage, forced movement, all conditions, and ongoing damage. Also, the stone warrior has resist 10 to all damage.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Slam ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 5 damage, and the stone warrior pushes the target 1 square.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Stone Grip ✦ At-Will** (1/round)	
Trigger: An enemy enters a square adjacent to a dormant stone warrior.	
Attack (Free Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +3 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 12).	
Effect: The stone warrior is not dormant.	
Str 17 (+3) **Dex** 7 (-2) **Wis** 10 (+0)	
Con 17 (+3) **Int** 3 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	



Tactics

The stone warriors are dormant at the encounter's start. They use *stone grip* as soon as a creature enters a square adjacent to them. To keep track of which constructs have used that power each round, place a die or other marker on each stone warrior when it uses *stone grip*. Remove all of the markers at the start of the warriors' turn.

When it is the stone warrior's turn to act, only those stone warriors already adjacent to a creature can make *slam* attacks. Characters hit by these attacks might be pushed into squares adjacent to other stone warriors, thus triggering their *stone grip* attacks.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Both the antechamber and the statue room are brightly lit. Light shines from two braziers in the former, while the green flames burning in the demonic statue's hand are the source in the latter.

Frescoes: The antechamber's walls feature intricate frescoes depicting stone warriors marching toward humans, trampling them underfoot and pulling them apart with their carved hands.

Demon Statue: On the statue room's far side stands a grotesque statue of a demon. A DC 20 Arcana check identifies the demon as a vrock, a type of powerful fiend that soars through the Abyss's skies. Between its feet rests a magic key on a bed of 600 sp. The statue's two eyes are amethysts (each worth 100 gp).

Encounter 7: The Crystal Pedestal

Encounter Level 3 (750 XP)

Setup

1 dretch
1 dust devil
1 ochre jelly
1 specter

The characters reach this chamber via the ladder which drops through the sarcophagus in Encounter 3. The ladder deposits the characters in the northwest corner of this room.

When the characters enter this room and can see their surroundings, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:
A dais dominates the chamber's middle area. On it stands a horrid statue that was carved to resemble a corpulent demon boasting an idiotic grin. It raises a crystal pedestal in both clawed hands. At the top are four tiny statues each gripping one part of a blue metal bar.

When a character inspects the tiny statues, read the following text aloud:
Each of the four statues gripping the key is unique and bears an inscription. The first depicts a squat, flabby demon carved from red stone with the word "IXAM" on a plate below. The next looks like a cloud made from clay with "ALRASTIL" below it. The third says "PENTUKO" and features an amorphous blob carved from amber. The fourth is made from glass, and it shows a humanoid form labeled "MYRG."

When a character touches a statuette or speaks its name aloud, the object disappears. Place the monster in one of the room's four corners and call for initiative checks. IXAM releases a dretch, ALRASTIL releases the dust devil, PENTUKO releases the ochre jelly, and MYRG releases the specter. If the creature was released by touching the statuette, the creature gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls and a +2 bonus to damage rolls until the end of its first turn. If the creature was released by speaking its name, it takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls and a -2 penalty to damage rolls until the end of its first turn.

If the characters take a short rest after defeating a creature, the creature they defeated reappears atop the pedestal and must be called again. The characters earn no additional XP for defeating the same creature more than once.

Arcana Check

DC 9: The character identifies the IXAM statuette as a dretch and the ALRASTIL statuette as a dust devil.

DC 13: The character detects a magical aura emanating from the statuettes at the pedestal's top.

DC 17: The character realizes what happens when a statuette is touched or its name is spoken aloud.

DC 20: The character realizes that speaking the name brings forth a momentarily weaker version of the creature.

Nature Check

DC 9: The character identifies the PENTUKO statuette as an ochre jelly.

Religion Check

DC 9: The character identifies the MYRG statuette as a specter.

Dretch Small elemental humanoid (demon)	**Level 2 Brute** XP 125
HP 44; **Bloodied** 22	**Initiative** +3
AC 14, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 11	**Perception** +1
Speed 5	Darkvision
Resist 10 variable (1/encounter)	
Traits	
☼ **Sickening Miasma** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Each enemy within the aura takes 1 damage whenever it takes a standard action or a move action. Multiple sickening miasma auras deal cumulative damage, up to 5 damage.	
Standard Actions	
⨁ **Savage Claws** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +5 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Frenzy of Claws** ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The dretch is first bloodied.	
Effect (Free Action): The dretch attacks one or two creatures with *savage claws*.	
⚚ **Vile Death** (poison, zone) ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The dretch drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect: Close burst 1 (any nondemons in the burst). The burst creates a zone of poison centered on the dretch that lasts until what would be the start of the dretch's next turn. Any nondemon that enters the zone or starts its turn there takes 5 poison damage.	
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+1)	
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 5 (-2) **Cha** 7 (-1)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal	

Dust Devil — **Level 3 Skirmisher**
Small fey humanoid (air, earth) — XP 150

HP 47; **Bloodied** 23 — **Initiative** +7
AC 18, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14; -2 to all defenses while slowed or immobilized — **Perception** +0
Speed 8
Immune disease, poison

Standard Actions

Grasping Winds ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 3 damage, and the dust devil slides the target 2 squares.

Stinging Sands ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst); +8 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d6 + 3 damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the dust devil's next turn.

Move Actions

Gale Blast ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: The dust devil shifts 5 squares and attacks each enemy adjacent to It (one attack per creature).
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target falls prone.

Skills Stealth +10
Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 15 (+3) **Int** 5 (-2) **Cha** 15 (+3)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Primordial

Ochre Jelly — **Level 3 Elite Brute**
Large natural beast (blind, ooze) — XP 300

HP 102; **Bloodied** 51 — **Initiative** +0
AC 15, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14 — **Perception** +2
Speed 4, climb 4 — Blindsight
Immune blinded, gaze effects; **Resist** 5 acid
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Ooze
While squeezing, the ooze moves at full speed rather than half speed, it doesn't take the -5 penalty to attack rolls, and it doesn't grant combat advantage for squeezing.

Standard Actions

Slam (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 1 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Move Actions

Flowing Form ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The ochre jelly shifts up to 4 squares.

Triggered Actions

Split ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The ochre jelly becomes bloodied.
Effect (No Action): The jelly splits into two creatures, each with hit points equal to one-half its current hit points. Effects on the original ochre jelly do not apply to the second one.

Str 13 (+2) **Dex** 8 (+0) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 1 (-4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Specter — **Level 4 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) — XP 175

HP 30; **Bloodied** 15 — **Initiative** +8
AC 16, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17 — **Perception** +6
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing — Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Traits

Spectral Chill (cold) ✦ **Aura** 1
Each enemy within the aura takes a -2 penalty to all defenses.

Standard Actions

Spectral Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 2 necrotic damage.

Spectral Barrage (illusion, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +7 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target falls prone.

Invisibility (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The specter becomes invisible until it hits or misses with an attack.

Skills Stealth +9
Str 10 (+2) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 8 (+1)
Con 13 (+3) **Int** 6 (+0) **Cha** 15 (+4)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common

Tactics

The called monsters fight to the death. They do not follow characters who leave the room.

Dretch: The dretch charges the nearest creature and slashes at enemies using its *savage claws*. Don't forget its triggered actions: *frenzy of claws* when first bloodied and *vile death* when dropped to 0 hit points.

Dust Devil: The dust devil flies about the room using *gale blast* and smashes its enemies using *grasping winds*. When it can catch three or more characters, it uses *stinging sands*.

Ochre Jelly: This horror uses *flowing form* each round, smashing a different hero each round with *slam*. Remember that it splits when it becomes bloodied.

Specter: The specter uses *invisibility* when it first appears and then moves into position to set up its *spectral barrage* attack. Until this power recharges, it either uses *invisibility* again to escape a defender or *spectral touch* to attack.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Illumination: This room is dark.

Treasure: Defeating all four creatures releases the magic key.

Encounter 8: Ghostly Necromancer

Encounter Level 6 (1,300 XP)

Setup

Ghost of Anarus Kalton (G)
2 bonewretch skeletons (B)
3 skeletons (S)
8 decrepit skeletons (D)

After Traevus murdered Anarus, the necromancer's ghost appeared in his treasure vault where he stored his most prized possessions. The violet curtain he had painstakingly created, however, bound him to this chamber as surely as it kept thieves out. The long months since his death have given him only mindless undead for company, and the long silence has driven him insane.

The characters can access this room only by assembling the four magic rods and placing the key into the violet mist. At that point, the rectangular contraption expands to become a doorway leading into this room.

When the characters enter this room, place the appropriate tiles and read the following text aloud:

Skeletal warriors, some in wretched condition, stand at the ready in this massive chamber. They raise swords and bows to protect the ghostly form of a headless humanoid dressed in long, flowing robes. Despite its lack of a head, the ghost cackles when you enter, greeting you with madness.

"Thieves!" it laughs, its voice echoing throughout the room. "I thank you for releasing me from prison. Your reward will be death!"

Place the tokens for each creature in the room except for the bonewretch skeletons, who are hiding. When the bonewretch skeletons take their first turn or are spotted, place them on the map.

If Traevus is with the heroes, the ghost and skeletons attack. If he isn't, a quick-witted adventurer might try to negotiate with the insane spirit. A DC 17 Diplomacy check stays the ghost's attack for at least a moment (see "Roleplaying the Ghost"). Otherwise, roll for initiative and record the players' initiative.

Roleplaying the Ghost

Although Anarus is both insane and evil, all he really wants is revenge against Traevus for murdering him. If the heroes get him talking, he readily reveals everything about how Traevus murdered him and stole his skull. After he has told this whole, sorry tale, he attacks. Traevus will deny everything, of course, if he's present, and urge the characters to attack immediately. During the fight, Anarus cackles and shrieks, mocking the heroes when they miss and cursing them when they hit.

If the characters learn the truth about Traevus from Anarus, there is one way they can avoid this fight—that is, if they grab Traevus, shove him into the room, and retreat immediately to the previous chamber. Anarus and his undead servants will tear Traevus to pieces. Anarus then retrieves his head in triumph, places it on his shoulders, and fades into the lower sarcophagus. At that point, Anarus and all of the other undead in the room except the decrepit skeletons collapse into harmless bones. Characters must still defeat the decrepit skeletons when they return to the chamber, but they earn full XP for overcoming the encounter.

Perception Check

DC 23: The character spots a bonewretch skeleton hiding behind a sarcophagus. A bonewretch skeleton looks like an ordinary skeleton but smaller—about 3 feet tall.

Ghost of Anarus Kalton **Level 3 Elite Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 300

HP 74; **Bloodied** 37 **Initiative** +2
AC 17, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 **Perception** +0
Speed 6, fly 6; phasing Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Rotting Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the ghost's next turn.

Shadow Darts (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one or two creatures); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of the ghost's next turn.

Spirit Flay (charm, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge 6**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).
Miss: The target is dazed (save ends).

Unraveling Doom (necrotic, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close blast 2 (enemies in the blast); +7 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 3 necrotic and psychic damage, and the target gains vulnerable 3 to all damage until the end of the ghost's next turn.

Spirit Swarm (necrotic, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is immobilized and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).
Each Failed Saving Throw: The target takes 5 psychic damage.
Miss: 5 necrotic damage.

Triggered Actions

Visage Revealed (fear, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The ghost is first bloodied.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +7 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

Ephemeral Ghost (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy misses the ghost with a melee or ranged attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The ghost becomes invisible until the start of its next turn. After becoming invisible, the ghost then shifts up to 3 squares.

Skills Arcana +9, Intimidate +8, Stealth +7
Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 9 (+0)
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 17 (+4) **Cha** 14 (+3)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common

2 Bonewretch Skeletons (B) **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Small natural animate (undead) XP 175 each

HP 55; **Bloodied** 27 **Initiative** +10
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 16 **Perception** +5
Speed 8 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Standard Actions

Ankle Bite ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the bonewretch skeleton's next turn

Move Actions

Rattling Shift ✦ **At-Will**
The bonewretch skeleton shifts up to 4 squares, ignoring difficult terrain.

Skills Stealth +13
Str 11 (+2) **Dex** 22 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 6 (+0) **Cha** 6 (+0)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

3 Skeletons (S) **Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 150 each

HP 45; **Bloodied** 22 **Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 **Perception** +3
Speed 6 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Traits

Speed of the Dead
When making an opportunity attack, a skeleton gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals 1d6 extra damage.

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the skeleton's next turn.

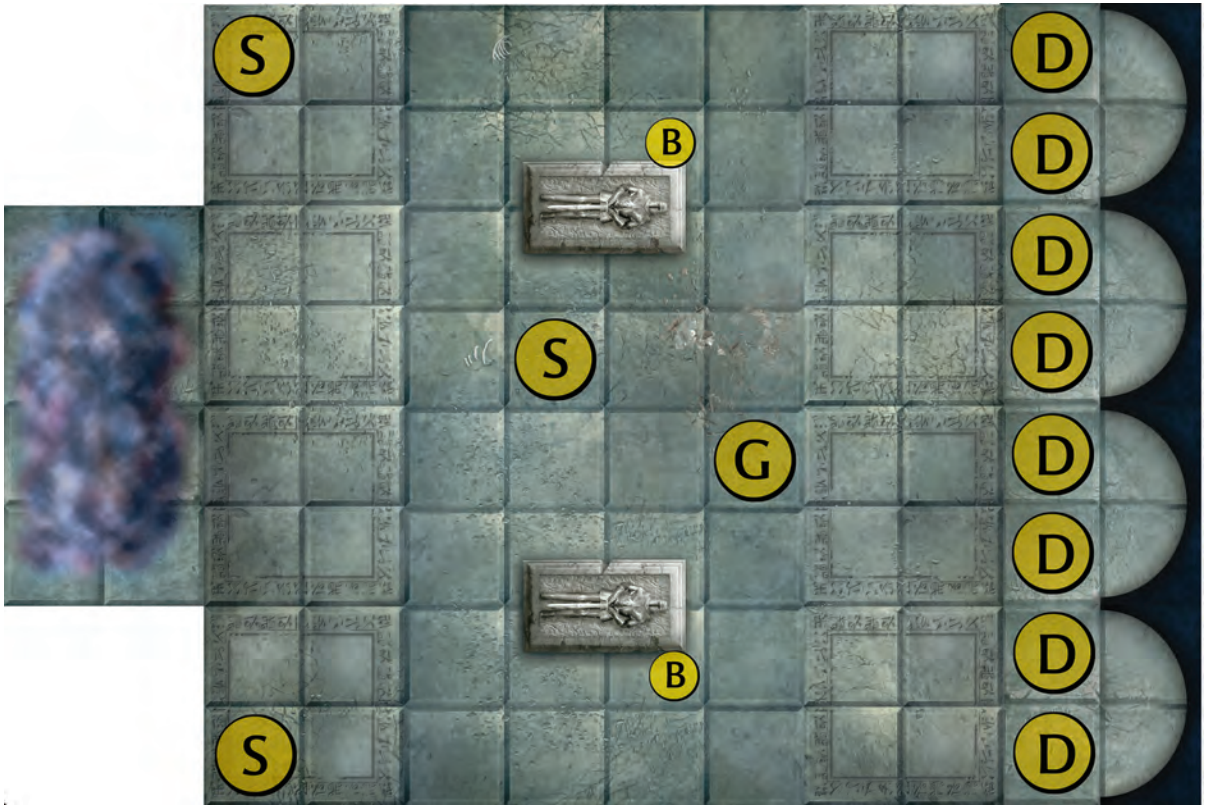
Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 3 (-3) **Cha** 3 (-3)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –
Equipment longsword

8 Decrepit Skeletons (D) Level 1 Minion Skirmisher	
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 25 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
Initiative +3	
AC 16, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Longsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The skeleton shifts 1 square before making its attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
➳ **Shortbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The skeleton shifts 1 square before making its attack.	
Attack: Ranged 15/30 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
Str 15 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+2)	
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 3 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	
Equipment longsword, shortbow, 20 arrows	

Tactics

Unless Traevus is handed over, Anarus Kalton vents all his pent-up wrath on the characters and throws everything he and his henchmen have into destroying them.

Ghost: Anarus hangs back, letting his skeletons bear the brunt of the attack, while he attacks with *spirit swarm*. He then spends an action point to use *spirit flay* against a striker whom he can manipulate with great effect. He orders dominated characters to attack the party's leaders. While waiting for *spirit flay* to recharge, he flies about the room, using *shadow darts* against the nearest character he can hit. If reduced to 16 hp or less, Anarus flees through the open portal by the safest route available. He does not pause to lock the heroes in but just rushes out, perhaps to trouble the adventurers later.



Bonewretch Skeletons: These skeletons move to engage front rank characters, using *ankle bite* on their first turns. After that, they use *rattling shift* to slip past defenders and hit controllers and strikers.

Skeletons: The skeletons hold the heroes back, moving to block their advance, relying on *speed of the dead* to augment their opportunity attacks.

Decrepit Skeletons: These minions hold their positions in the alcoves, supporting their allies using *shortbow* each round until engaged in melee, at which point they shift away to continue their barrage.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Illumination: The violet curtain fills the room with dim light.

Sarcophagi: Two blank-lidded sarcophagi rest near the room's center. The sarcophagi grant cover to creatures standing behind them.

These boxes were made as expansions to the tomb but no dead were ever entombed within them. Instead, Anarus stashed his most precious belongings inside. The top sarcophagus holds a +2 *amulet of protection*, 2 small onyx stones worth 100 gp each, and a brown pouch containing 90 gp.

The bottom sarcophagus holds the *Anarusi Codex* (see below), a pair of *hedge wizard's gloves* (*Adventurer's Vault* page 135), a *potion of healing*, and 20 gp scattered across the bottom. These coins were minted during the time of King Elidyr of Nerath. If the players have the "Dark Secrets Revealed" or "Weird Lights on the Moor" quests, they also discover 170 gp.

Anarusi Codex

This wicked tome compiles all of Anarus Kalton's discoveries, theories, and filthy incantations. The cover is charred skin stretched taught over wooden boards. The vellum pages are sticky with unspeakable stains; the writing is scrawled in red ink, and is accompanied by strange diagrams and disturbing illustrations.

The *Anarusi Codex* is a magical implement useable by wizards. Although powerful, the tome is stained with dark magic and it tricks its user into believing that everyone is an enemy.

In addition to the features described below, the *Codex* may also contain other dark rituals whose uses are left to you to decide.

Anarusi Codex +2 — **Level 10 Rare**

What secrets are contained in this dread volume? What horrors will be awakened by reading its befouled pages?

Implement (Tome)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +2d6 necrotic damage and the target is weakened until the end of your next turn
Property: When you use a wizard spell with this tome as its implement, you can change the damage type to necrotic. If you do so, the spell gains the necrotic keyword.
Property: When you use this tome as an implement, you treat all allies as enemies until the end of your next turn.
Power (**Daily ✦ Summoning**): Free Action. *Trigger:* When using this tome as your implement, you drop a Small or Medium enemy to 0 hit points with an implement attack power. That enemy must not be a construct, ooze, or plant. *Effect:* You summon a shuffling zombie (see below) in the target's space. The shuffling zombie is an ally to you and your allies. The zombie lacks actions of its own. Instead, you spend your own actions to allow the zombie to perform actions from its list. The zombie can perform the same type of action which you spend commanding it. You can command it to perform a standard, move, and minor action each turn. You must have line of effect to the zombie in order to command it.
When the zombie makes an attack roll or any check, you make the roll using your modifiers and scores. The zombie has no healing surges.
The zombie cannot use weapons, implements, or any other items.
A zombie remains in play until you take an extended rest, you dismiss it (a minor action), or it drops to 0 hit points.

Shuffling Zombie — **Level –**
Small or Medium natural animate (undead) — XP –

HP your bloodied value — **Initiative** –
Defenses your defenses — **Perception** –
Speed 4
Immune disease, poison

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bash** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); Intelligence + 2 vs. AC
Hit: 6 damage.

⸸ **Grab** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); Intelligence vs. Reflex
Hit: 3 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC equals your Will).

Move Actions

Move ✦ At-Will
Effect: The zombie stands up, crawls or shifts 1, or climbs or walks its speed. It cannot run.

Triggered Actions

Follow ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The shuffling zombie is more than 10 squares from you when you end your turn.
Effect: As a free action, the zombie walks by the most direct route to the nearest unoccupied square that is within 10 squares of you. If the zombie must walk more than 8 squares to reach this square, it instead drops to 0 hit points.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred role-playing game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars*RPG, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Player's Handbook 3*, *Martial Power 2*, and *Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons* and in the pages of both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Robert lives in Tennessee.

THE DREAMHEART

By Bruce R. Cordell ✦ *illustration by Kristina Carroll*

Raidon saw Japheth standing over the severed tentacle that had clutched the artifact.

Raidon took a limping step toward the warlock. "Be careful," he advised, "Don't touch the . . ."

The monk trailed off as Japheth turned slowly to face him. The warlock held a dark, oblong object in both hands.

"Drop it, now!" Raidon commanded, his voice shocked. "We must destroy it!"

"No," came Japheth's voice, drenched in sorrow. "Not yet. It has Anusha's mind. I must wake her. It is my fault she couldn't wake up! Her soul is trapped inside . . ."

"If you don't release the stone, it will claim you, too," replied Raidon. He sidled toward Angul's flickering length.

Japheth ignored the monk. All of the warlock's attention was on the stone. Japheth gazed into it as if it were a scrying ball. He chanted words slippery with magic.

"What are you doing? Stop, lest you disturb it further!" Raidon yelled.

Japheth paid no mind. The warlock spoke into the stone with a voice augmented with magical tremolo, "Wake up! Wake up! Anusha, if you're in there, wake up! Ignore the thrice-damned elixir!"

The Sign on Raidon's chest fell in temperature so precipitously that the monk's breath began to steam.

"Wake up!" Japheth yelled again with all the force of an invocation.

KEY OF STARS: ABOLETHIC SOVEREIGNTY BOOK 3

In the novel *Plague of Spells*, Raidon Kane discovered a uniquely powerful artifact that proved to be the petrified eye of the Eldest aboleth. In *City of Torment*, he managed to keep the Eldest from completely waking, but at the cost of his own shattered mind. In *Key of Stars*, destiny hands Raidon one last chance to avert the Sovereignty's agenda, but only if he can find within himself the strength to care. Raidon, the warlock Japheth, and Anusha, a young woman whose dreams are made real, must find the Key of Stars before all reality drowns beneath a tide of mind shattering revelations.

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The Dreamheart bucked in the warlock's hand.

It woke up.

A seam on the stone parted; an eyelid shuttered open. Raidon met the eye's primordial stare.

It was like looking down on the clouds of some distant, storm-tossed world, clouds that ringed a pupil empty as death.

"Oh," gasped Japheth.

Raidon took two more steps, plunged his arm into the water, and came up with the Blade Cerulean. It was the only tool capable of destroying the relic. He whirled, charged, yelling "Release it!"

"No," replied Japheth. "I'll not abandon Anusha so easily."

The great eye blinked. The darkness in the pupil's center rushed out, seemed to billow and inflate the warlock's cloak with a malign influence all its own.

Japheth stepped backward into the darkness and was gone.

THE DREAMHEART

The Eldest is the first and oldest aboleth of Faerûn who seeped into the world before the war between the gods and primordials was concluded. The Eldest remained quiescent so long that its flesh became as stone and its mind slowed to the speed of a glacier. The *Dreamheart* is literally one of the Eldest's many eyes, carved from its petrified flesh.

Despite physical separation, the *Dreamheart* remains psionically linked to its progenitor. Anyone who wields the *Dreamheart* is influenced by it. The wielder sees phantasms of glory that are sometimes terrifying, sometimes unearthly in their beauty. Visions of antediluvian events, words of primeval malice, and swirling images of a churning void and atonal vibrations invade the wielder's sleeping and sometimes waking mind.

The more the *Dreamheart* is used, the more likely something untoward happens to the wielder. Simultaneously, the dreams of the Eldest are jostled whenever power is channeled from the artifact, which risks briefly rousing the creature from its eons-long sleep.

A creature of the Far Realm sent to colonize reality, the Eldest broods over a city of its abolethic children. Should it finally wake fully, it will take it as a sign that the time is finally right. It will set about tearing wide the walls of the world so that the madness of the Far Realm can drown everything in a tide of unceasing madness.

Dreamheart **Paragon Level**

This oblong chunk of stone usually appears unimpressive to the eye. But on the plane of the mind, the Dreamheart is a scintillating font of color, dreams, and endless possibilities. It is a beacon of power and a literal promise of incredible knowledge and dominance to any willing to listen. When the relic's most potent power is channeled, a seam along the stone splits and an eye blinks open. Through it, the Eldest aboleth looks out.

The *Dreamheart* is a *+5 magic orb* implement with the following properties and powers.

Implement (Orb)

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +5d10 damage

Property: Clerics and warlocks can use the *Dreamheart* as an implement for cleric and warlock powers, and cleric and warlock paragon path powers, respectively.

Property: You gain a +5 item bonus to Athletics and Endurance checks.

Power (Encounter ✦ Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic): Standard Action. You can use *mesmeric hold* (wizard 13). Use your highest ability modifier from Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma for the attack. If every target of the attack is an aberration, this power is not expended for the encounter.

Power (Encounter ✦ Arcane): Standard Action. You can use *eye of the warlock* (warlock 16).

Power (Daily ✦ Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic): Standard Action. You can use *confusion* (wizard 27). Use your highest ability modifier from Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma for the attack. If the target of the attack is an aberration, this power is not expended for the day.

Power (Daily ✦ Arcane): Minor Action. You throw caution to the wind and compel the eye to open! See "Eye of the Eldest" below to resolve the effect. The *Dreamheart* then vanishes and is lost (see "Moving On" below).

Goals of the Dreamheart

- Suborn wielders to take up the star pact to serve the Eldest
- Wake the Eldest aboleth
- Shatter the walls of the world and so leave it naked to the influence of the Far Realm

Roleplaying the Dreamheart

The *Dreamheart* communicates through dreams. It projects the barest hints of eldritch secrets into the wielder's mind, as well as images of the wielder enjoying the fruits of vast power after learning further forbidden lore. The *Dreamheart* tempts its wielder solely through the great power it offers, apparently free for the asking. The evil of the *Dreamheart* is not active but rather a slow, seeping influence of corruption. Its agency replies upon the greed and suggestibility of someone already foolish enough to take up and wield a petrified piece of an evil proto-deity.

Warlocks who use the *Dreamheart* are compelled to shift to the star pact if that is not already their pact. Clerics who use the *Dreamheart* are compelled over a period of weeks to revere the Eldest as if it was their deity.

Concordance

Unlike most artifacts, the *Dreamheart* functions at full power, as if with full concordance, for any creature that can use it as an implement. Using the artifact's encounter and daily powers does involve some risk. At the end of a turn when the wielder used any of the *Dreamheart's* encounter or daily powers, roll a d20. If a 1 is rolled, the eye in the stone opens of its own accord; see "Eye of the Eldest" below to resolve the effect. The *Dreamheart* then vanishes and is lost (see "Moving On" below).

Moving On

"*The darkness in the pupil's center rushes out. The Dreamheart falls into that darkness, and is gone.*"

The *Dreamheart* was only recently plucked from the Eldest's body. As such, the artifact has no storied past; it has only passed through a handful of wielders. Each time a wielder consciously or accidentally causes the eye to shutter open, the Eldest aboleth wakes to a light doze and makes some change to the world, before slipping back into deeper slumber. However, one day the Eldest's eye will not shut. On that day, the Eldest will fully rouse, and the Abolethic Sovereignty will come into its own.

Eye of the Eldest

If the eye of the *Dreamheart* opens, refer to the table below. Regardless of what else happens, the *Dreamheart* vanishes as described under "Moving On."

EYE OF THE ELDEST TABLE

Trigger: The wielder purposefully opens the *Dreamheart* eye or rolls a 1 on a d20 after using a *Dreamheart* power during the turn.

2d6	Effect
2	Trapped In Xxiphu
3-4	Scourge of Kuo-Toa
5-9	Comes the Sovereignty
10-11	Timespace Sojourn
12	Behold the Tyrant

Trapped In Xxiphu

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The *Dreamheart* immediately Moves On, and you fall unconscious and cannot be awakened. Your soul has been sucked down into the mind of the Eldest in the abolethic city of Xxiphu.

Major Quest: Free the Soul

The remaining characters must find Xxiphu and enter it to release your bound soul. Xxiphu may be deep beneath the earth, on another plane, or hovering ten miles over the Sea of Fallen Stars and guarded by gravity-defying kraken and aboleth overseers. Your soul is trapped within the stratified memories of the Eldest, which manifests as a wall of icelike crystal deep inside Xxiphu. If the ice is shattered, your soul is released and you regain consciousness.

Ask your DM to allow you to create a temporary character to play until your trapped character is found and released. If your original character is finally released, transfer any XP gained by your temporary character to your original character, in addition to any XP earned from the quest.

Quest XP: 16,000 XP

Scourge of Kuo-Toa

Effect (Immediate Reaction): Two kuo-toa lashes (*Monster Manual* 3 page 125) appear in adjacent, empty squares within 10 squares of you. The kuo-toas begin play under your command and act on your initiative. You must spend a standard action each turn to sustain the effect. If you fail to do so, you lose control of the kuo-toas and they become your enemies until they are defeated. At the end of the encounter or when the kuo-toas are defeated, they (or their bodies) disappear.

Comes the Sovereignty

Effect (Immediate Reaction): An aboleth overseer (*Monster Manual* page 8) appears in an empty square within 10 squares of you. The aboleth begins play under your command and acts on your initiative. You must spend a standard action each turn to sustain the effect. If you fail to do so, you lose control of the aboleth and it becomes your enemy until it is defeated. At the end of the encounter, when 5 minutes have passed, or when the aboleth is defeated, it (or its body) disappears.

Timespace Sojourn

Effect (Immediate Reaction): A soundless explosion of purple light tears a hole in reality in an empty square adjacent to you. You and your allies within 10 squares of you are pulled into the maw like flies on a frog's tongue. You find yourself in an empty, extradimensional space that is a mote of eroded stone 5 squares wide and 5 squares long. The mote appears to float in an infinite vault of darkness in which only a scattering of ancient, dying stars yet burn. The extradimensional space is separate from the world or other planes of existence and lasts for 8 hours. At the end of 8 hours, the mote dissolves, and you and all creatures in the space reappear in the squares where you were before the timespace sojourn.

At that point, 8 hours have passed for you, but the DM determines how much time has passed in the world. It may be that no time at all passed from where and when this effect was triggered, that 8 hours passed, or that some longer period of days, months, or years has elapsed.

Behold the Tyrant

Effect (Immediate Reaction): A beholder eye of shadow (*Monster Manual* 3 page 22) appears in an empty space within 10 squares of you. If that space gives the eye of shadow superior cover or total concealment, it can make an immediate Stealth check to become hidden. The beholder begins play under your command and acts on your initiative. You must spend a full round action (a minor, a move, and standard action) each turn to sustain the effect. If you fail to do so, you lose control of the beholder and it becomes your enemy until it is defeated. At the end of the encounter, when 5 minutes have passed, or when the beholder is defeated, it (or its body) disappears.

About the Author

Bruce R. Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits include the new *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide, Keep on the Shadowfell, Draconomicon I: Chromatic Dragons,* and *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*. Bruce is also an author of Forgotten Realms novels, including *Plague of Spells,* the first book in the Abolethic Sovereignty series.

Unearthed Arcana
Curses (Foiled Again)

By Peter Schaefer
Illustration by Kent Williams

Editor's Note: This article kicks off a new feature in Dragon *and* Dungeon *magazines. "Unearthed Arcana" will explore topics which aren't easily incorporated into the formal structure of the* Dungeons & Dragons *game, replace existing rules with variants, or extend the game in other unofficial, experimental ways. For more on "Unearthed Arcana," see this month's* Dragon *editorial.*

Curses are a traditional element of fantasy stories, legends, and myths. The princess is cursed to sleep until rescued. A titan lashes out with his death curse as he is killed. The devil curses a mortal to spill worms from his mouth if he tries to speak of their bargain. Until the hero can overcome the curse, he or she must struggle beneath its weight.

This article focuses on curses that impede the subject's daily habits and pursuit of goals. Larger curses are a matter of story arcs, or entire campaigns, such as the kingdom cursed to remain under a raincloud until the young prince consents to marry the hideous sorceress.

Curses use the same rules as diseases once a creature has been cursed. A curse has a track similar to the disease track. A cursed creature makes an Arcana, Nature, or Religion check after each extended rest to determine the character's progression on the curse track. The relevant skill varies based on what is thematic for the curse: a wizard's curse requires Arcana; a forest spirit's curse requires Nature; an angel's divine curse requires Religion.

A cursed character cannot be cured by successful use of the appropriate skill. Most curses end when certain conditions are met, either relative to the target or in some absolute terms. Included with each curse is a suggested end condition. Individualizing end conditions to a specific game or plot makes the curse more engaging. The Remove Affliction ritual is

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another method for removing curses on a character. Sometimes, the creature that applied the curse can remove it.

Example Curses

Forestfoe Curse — Level 4 Curse

The sprightly forest spirit looks down from a branch high above. "You are no longer welcome in Father Burl's domain! Wheresoever you walk, the forest will trip you, tug at your clothes, and cast you down!"

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, squares adjacent to a tree are difficult terrain for the target, and travel through forests and wooded terrain takes the target twice as long.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, squares within 3 squares of a tree are difficult terrain for the target, and travel through forests and wooded terrain takes the target twice as long.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, squares within 5 squares of a tree are difficult terrain for the target, and travel through forests and wooded terrain takes the target twice as long. Additionally, when the target is hit by an attack while in such a square, he or she is knocked prone.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Nature check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
9 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
10-13: No change.
14 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: A spirit of the forest chooses to release the target from the curse.

Fire's Foe Curse — Level 5 Curse

The defeated spellcaster stares at you with hatred. "Beware flame henceforth—you will attract it until you become a walking inferno."

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes an additional 5 fire damage when targeted by a fire effect.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage while within 1 square of a fire effect (save ends).

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage when targeted by a fire effect (save ends). The target takes 5 fire damage when an adjacent creature is the target of a fire effect. The target takes 5 fire damage if it ends its turn adjacent to any fire the size of a candle flame or larger.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Arcana check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
9 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
10-14: No change.
15 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: The target is granted clemency by a fire archon or a natural spirit of fire.

Satyr's Dancing Curse — Level 6 Curse

"Your feet will want to dance," the satyr had said. Whenever you lose control, you begin to sway and move to a rhythm only you can hear.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target slides 1 square in a random direction when the target starts his or her turn dazed.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target slides 2 squares in a random direction when the target starts his or her turn dazed.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target slides 4 squares in a random direction when the target starts his or her turn dazed.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Arcana check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
10 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
11-13: No change.
14 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: The target saves the life of a satyr or wins a kiss from an eladrin princess.

Speechbane Curse — Level 8 Curse

You've learned what you sought to learn, but the warlock has the last words on that subject. "You will find it impossible to pass on the knowledge you just gained, fool."

In all three stages, when the target tries to communicate about a subject forbidden by the curse-giver, the target begins vomiting maggots until the target stops trying to communicate about the forbidden subject. Additional effects are noted below.

Stage 1: The target is stunned until the end of the turn when he or she stops trying to communicate about the forbidden subject.

Stage 2: The target is stunned (save ends).

Stage 3: The target is stunned and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both).

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Arcana check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
11 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
12–15: No change.
16 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: The target goes a year and a day without speaking, or consumes food prepared by the creature that placed the curse.

Curse of Rage — Level 12 Curse

You weren't sure what the spirit of corrupted nature had meant when it promised you that even your allies would come to know you as an enemy. As you strike at your ally with uncontrollable rage, however, it becomes tragically clear.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, when the target starts his or her next turn after taking a critical hit, he or she makes a melee basic attack or a charge attack against the nearest valid ally.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2 and while the target is bloodied, he or she makes a melee basic attack or a charge attack against the nearest valid ally at the start of the target's turn.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, when the target starts his or her next turn after being hit by an attack, he or she makes a melee basic attack or a charge attack against the nearest valid ally.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Nature check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
13 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
14–19: No change.
20 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: The target slays the creature that placed the curse or permanently ends a violent threat against a peaceful community.

Curse of Isolation — Level 16 Curse

The priest spoke these words to you only minutes ago: "You choose not to see the inevitable. Perhaps, if you cannot see and hear the life around you, you will have time to think about your choice."

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -5 penalty on Insight and Perception checks and on passive Insight and Perception.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, roll one die after each extended rest and short rest. On an even roll, the target is blinded until the next rest. On an odd roll, the target is deafened until the next rest.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target is blinded and deafened.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Religion check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
15 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
16–21: No change.
22 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: The target goes a year and a day without seeing or hearing any creature, or the target consumes the eye of a beholder.

Curse of Angelic Torment — Level 19 Curse

Time slows. With a dozen wounds dripping divine blood, the angel looks at you, and you feel your soul resound with the promise of infinite torment.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, a silver mask of the angel's face appears near the target unpredictably, speaking uncomfortable truths and making dire predictions.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, a silver mask of the angel's face appears near the target unpredictably, speaking uncomfortable truths and making dire predictions. The target cannot score critical hits.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, a silver mask of the angel's face appears near the target unpredictably, speaking uncomfortable truths and making dire predictions. When the target scores a critical hit, bonus damage from that attack is applied to the cursed character rather than to the target of the attack.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Religion check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
16 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
17–23: No change.
24 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: The target is blessed by the god whom the angel serves or by a superior angel.

Death Titan's Curse — Level 25 Curse

The last of the death titan's captured soul flies from his grasp, and he falls to his knees. With his last breath, he utters, "Let even the slightest touch bring you great pain."

The target of the Death Titan's Curse feels intense pain when any other creature is adjacent. Additional effects are noted below.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target gains vulnerable 5 to all damage while adjacent to any other creature.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target gains vulnerable 10 to all damage while adjacent to any other creature.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target gains vulnerable 15 to all damage while adjacent to any other creature.

Stage 4: While affected by stage 4, the target is weakened and gains vulnerable 15 to all damage while adjacent to any other creature.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Religion check if he or she is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
20 or lower: The stage of the curse increases by one.
21–28: No change.
29 or higher: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 1, no change occurs).

Ending the Curse: The target dies or is forgiven by the death titan's next of kin.

About the Author

As an RPG developer, **Peter Schaefer** worked on such books as *Adventurer's Vault 2*, *The Plane Below*, and *Player's Handbook 3*, in addition to numerous D&DI articles. But that is only a sideline, as Earth dollars do not pay for the lifestyle of a multiversal delver such as he. The wavefunction manifold alone requires a small power plant to engage. He earns his bread by mapping alternate dimensions in exchange for crystallized terajoules with which he can power his crossworld jaunts.

Blood and Dragonshards: Backdrop Qbarra, Part 1

By Keith Baker

illustration by Adam Gillespie and Matias Tapia

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Honorable lords and ladies, if you love your nation I urge you to heed my words. The scales pose an untenable threat to the operations of my house. Without the steady revenues my family brings to the crown, this little country of yours will wither and die. The facts speak for themselves. Attacks by the scales have increased tenfold in the last year. The Poison Dusk tribe accounts for the majority of these raids, but the documents before you hold proof of strikes by the Shining Claws and the Lingering Light. By now I'm sure you've heard the rumors of the armies massing at Ka'rhashan. I know some among you believe we can live in harmony with these creatures. Unfortunately, this is simply not the case. The Cold Sun Federation is not our ally. Its members are scales, and at the end of the day we'll always be softskins to them. We'll always be the outsiders and invaders, and in the wake of the Mourning they see us as weak and vulnerable. Trust them too far and you will eventually wake up in a pool of your own blood.

Nobles of Newthrone. Lords of Q'barra. I don't ask you to risk your own people in the battle that lies ahead. All I ask is that you untie my hands and let me assemble the troops I need to cleanse this land once and for all. Let me drive the scales into the ocean and give you the security you have always craved.

–Khalar Velderan d'Tharashk,
addressing the Lords of Newthrone

In the world of Eberron, dragonshards are the lifeblood of modern civilization. From the message stones of House Sivis and the airships of House Lyrandar to the coldfire lanterns found on the streets of every city, dragonshards are an integral part of life in the Thronehold nations. With every year the demand for shards grows.

Humans came to Q'barra in search of sanctuary, not profit. Less than a decade ago, colonists in Pitchwall found a patch of Eberron dragonshards while digging new wells. Drawn by the reports, Tharashk prospectors soon found that Q'barra had vast Eberron dragonshard deposits, including Eberron shards with qualities never before seen by the house. Combined with the end of the Last War, this discovery has drawn a host of new forces to Q'barra. The shard rush is on, and this is threatening to destroy the delicate balance of power that exists between the humans and the native races of the region . . . and potentially, to unleash horrors from the dawn of time.

The Nature of the Trade

Dragonshards are divided into three primary categories. Siberys shards fall from the sky. Khyber shards are found deep below the ground or are hidden in the roots of mountains. Eberron shards are found in the upper soil of the earth. The mineral wealth of Q'barra is primarily Eberron shards. The most common of the three classes, Eberron shards are the basic fuel of the magical economy. A single Eberron shard is far less valuable than a Khyber shard or Siberys shard, but a patch of shards can still make a lone miner rich.

Since Eberron shards are found in the upper earth, mining operations don't involve deep shafts. The largest mines are vast open pits blasted into the earth. Smaller operations involve miners combing through the soil or searching riverbeds. The process is long and tedious, and the greatest skill involved comes in picking a promising location for prospecting. Q'barra is rich in shards, but it can still take weeks to find a promising shard site, and the mining is slow work. A geode worth 25 gp is a fortune to a simple farmer, but adventurers can find more excitement and rewards by exploring the ancient ruins scattered across Q'barra. So, characters can find a better life than that of the shard miner—but the industry can still serve as the basis for many adventures.

Many of the richest deposits of dragonshards are in regions inhabited by the native races of Q'barra. Heavy deposits of shards are found around ruins dating back to the Age of Demons. The dragonborn treat these areas as sacred ground, and each dragonborn clan defends a number of ruins. Other shard deposits are found in the lands of the more primitive lizardfolk. Furthermore, House Tharashk has discovered that many tribes of the Cold Sun Federation have amassed large quantities of dragonshards. Although they appear to make no use of the shards aside from using them as decoration, the lizardfolk refuse to part with these shards.

King Sebastes has worked hard to earn the trust of dragonborn and lizardfolk leaders, and he has forbidden any shard mining in scale territory. Unfortunately, Sebastes's reach is woefully limited, and what forces he has have been strained trying to protect his people from the increasingly aggressive actions of the Poison Dusk. On the surface, House Tharashk respects Sebastes's edict, though

Skill Challenge: Finding Eberron Shards

As a skill challenge, finding Eberron shards involves Arcana (sensing the presence of shards, though the geode shielding makes this a difficult task), Nature (understanding the effect shard radiation can have on wildlife), and Perception (recognizing patterns of soil that suggest the presence of shards).

Lord Khalar continues to lobby for a free hand in the region. Despite this, many independent prospectors—many of whom are secretly working for Tharashk—continue to cross into forbidden territory. Bandits from the Five Nations raid lizardfolk caches and poorly guarded mining camps. The city of Hope has become a haven for bandit and rogue prospector alike, and the Tharashk enclave buys raw dragonshards with no questions asked.

The scales have been quick to respond to these activities. The dragonborn show no mercy to anyone caught in their holy sites. Lizardfolk have struck both independent and Tharashk mines, venturing into human-held territory to sabotage mining operations and steal shards. Shards caravans are frequently ambushed by forces of the Cold Sun Federation and the Poison Dusk, and bandits from Hope take advantage of this to cover their own attacks. The Poison Dusk has struck innocent farms and villages, stirring greater anger against the scales. Greed and xenophobia have turned Q'barra into a tinderbox, and one good spark could ignite the fires of war.

The Value of Dragonshards

Eberron dragonshards are a vital part of Khorvaire's magical economy. But exactly what are they good for? What is their value on the open market, and is there anything else that makes them useful to adventurers? Beyond this, what are the unique types of Eberron dragonshards that are found only in Q'barra, and what makes them special?

In the Eberron® campaign setting, Eberron dragonshards are a required component of most common magic items. Approximately 25 percent of the cost of enchanting a magic item comes in the form of dragonshards. A character can create an item without Eberron shards, but it requires an exotic array of components that vary widely for each item, such as hydra blood, the hairs of a manticore's mane, and similarly esoteric items. As such, the modern industry of enchantment has come to rely on dragonshards.

Beyond this, Eberron dragonshards are charged with raw magical energy that can be tapped for any form of complex magic. In this way, Eberron dragonshards duplicate the effects of *residuum*. The market value of an Eberron dragonshard is its equivalent value in *residuum*; if a shard is used in a ritual that uses less than the full value of the shard, it partially melts away.

Eberron shards are found in small geodes, typically containing 1d6 pure crystals worth 5 to 25 gp apiece. Rich fields such as those found in Q'barra and the Shadow Marches can yield larger shards that are the size of a human fist; these shards are worth up to 250 gp. Larger shards have correspondingly higher value but are rare. Higher grades of shards have greater concentrations of magical energy, translating to a greater market value.

Q'barra is known for two unusual grades of Eberron dragonshards. Dusk shards are a smoky gray with vivid red veins, and dawn shards are pale orange with crimson threads. Both shards are worth five times as much as a standard shard of similar size, so the smallest dusk shard is worth 25 gp. Dusk and dawn shards also provide a +2 bonus to any skill check associated with rituals performed using the shards as the sole source of components.

The miners have yet to discover the source of this unusual power. The truth is that the dawn shards are charged with the divine power of the Silver Flame, and the dark shards are imbued with the essence of the immortal fiend Malsvirik. As a result, these shards or the *residuum* produced from them could have other remarkable effects, entirely of the DM's choosing. For example, when a priest of the Silver Flame uses a dawn shard in the Inquisitive's Eyes ritual, the ritual might peer much further into the past than expected ... or produce an effect that lasts for months or years instead of the usual 10 minutes, effectively locking the caster into visions of the past. Alternatively, someone using dusk shards for divination rituals could receive messages directly from Malsvirik, or misleading information that serves the purposes of the overlord. More information about Malsvirik will be provided in an upcoming article.

House Tharashk doesn't sell raw Eberron dragonshards. Instead, Tharashk refineries process dragonshards to produce *residuum*. A shard processed by Tharashk refineries produces more *residuum* than its raw market value; this is how Tharashk makes its profit on the trade.

House Tharashk

The dragonshard trade is the foundation of House Tharashk's wealth and power. The Dragonmark of Finding gives the house an unbeatable edge when it comes to prospecting. Shardfinders use mystical focus items that channel the power of the dragonmark to locate a specific class of object, allowing them to find the richest fields with ease. As a result, they can afford to bring vast resources to bear, since they know they will get a solid return for their mining. Tharashk mines are vast pits with dozens or hundreds of miners at work. Tharashk uses Lyrandar airships and elemental galleons to haul shards back to the Five Nations, but airships require docking towers and thus can't reach most of the jungle mines. As a result, a steady stream of Tharashk caravans travels across Hope. These caravans are well-guarded, but bandits and the Poison Dusk are a constant threat.

Tharashk's operations in Q'barra are controlled by the Velderan clan. Lord Khalar Velderan is a cunning and ruthless man. In his youth he was an inquisitive in Sharn, and he's comfortable fighting with either words or steel. Khalar is human, but the majority of the Tharashk forces in the region are orcs or half-orcs. The house has also brought large numbers of monstrous mercenaries to Q'barra to serve as laborers and guards. Ogres and minotaurs are found at Tharashk sites, and gargoyles and harpies serve as messengers and scouts. Repurposed warforged titans perform the heavy mining operations at the largest pits. However, there is always room for cheap labor at a Tharashk mine.

Despite the success he has enjoyed so far, Lord Khalar is hungry to expand his operations and chafes at the restrictions imposed by King Sebastes.

Although he is careful not to endanger the position of his house, he is secretly funding a number of teams that are operating in forbidden territory. He doesn't care if independent miners enjoy limited success, but if a lucky prospector found a remarkably rich deposit, Khalar might try to buy out his or her claim . . . and failing that, employ bandits or others to drive the settler from his or her claim.

The largest Tharashk mine is known as the Dragon's Maw. Located east of Whitecliff, the Dragon's Maw has an airship docking tower of its own. Although the pit is beginning to run dry, the Maw serves as a hub for Tharashk caravans and is a thriving community in its own right. Far from Newthrone, the Maw serves as a base of operations for Khalar's covert operations, and when Khalar isn't lobbying in Newthrone, he stays here. Khalar is considering establishing a full refinery here to keep the Maw running when the shards finally run dry.

Independent Prospectors

Many people lost their livelihoods, homes, or even their homeland in the Last War. The stories of wealth waiting to be found in the soil of Q'barra are a beacon of hope for these people, and many seek to find a new beginning in Hope. Prospecting is one path to fortune, but others prosper off the rush itself, providing services in the new communities that spring up around shard deposits.

A significant portion of this new wave of prospectors is made up of soldiers discharged following the Last War. National tensions still run hot in some places, and many times Thranes and Karrns have battled over a new find. One of the most infamous sites is Gray Ash Pit, also known as the Gap. Manned largely by Karrns who follow the faith of the Blood of Vol, the Gap was established by Durc Lurran, a necromancer who served with the Order of the Onyx Skull. A handful of zombies and skeletons man the pit; a few of these are made from the corpses of bandits who have attacked the Gap, serving as a grisly warning to others who might have the same idea.

Riedra

Eberron dragonshards are as useful to the psions of Riedra as they are to the artificers of Khorvaire, and such shards are extremely rare in Sarlona. As a result, the Riedrans are extremely interested in Q'barra. The Inspired ambassador Jhakanath has provided King Sebastes with a garrison of troops to help defend his young nation, and a Riedran quarter has sprung up in the city of Newthrone. Jhakanath is purchasing large quantities of shards from House Tharashk, but the Inspired have also secured permission to start their own mining operations. Nonetheless, the richest shard deposits lie in the lands of the scales, and Sebastes won't let the Riedrans threaten his relationship with the lizardfolk or dragonborn . . . yet. The Inspired have ways of influencing people, and Sebastes might have dreams of the threat posed by the scales—dreams that encourage him to accept further aid from Riedra, and to build up an army strong enough to seize land from the dragonborn and claim the kingdom his people deserve. Sebastes isn't the only target for such influence; the Inspired can also further this goal by planting dreams in the minds of the dragonborn. Conflict in Q'barra serves the Inspired well, since it increases Sebastes's need for Riedran troops.

Where's the Adventure?

The *Eberron Campaign Guide* includes a number of plot hooks for Q'barra, including the threat of Mishva the Conqueror. The dragonshard trade presents a number of new options.

Home Sweet Home

In a handful of frontier villages, scales and settlers live side by side. This can be an excellent starting point for a new group of adventurers. A dragonborn might be here trying to learn the ways of the softskins. A Cyran soldier could be searching for a new home. A Valenar elf might have abandoned her people after their betrayal of Cyre. A wandering Talentan bard could be collecting the stories of the jungle. A priest of the Silver Flame might feel a strange draw to this place. These are just a few examples; anyone could have a reason to leave the west and start anew. Think about the roles the characters might play in a small community. A cleric adventurer could be the village priest. A Sivis gnome might be in charge of the message stone. A bard could be a beloved source of entertainment. How could the skills and abilities of the other characters be put to use in a small town?

As adventurers work their way to the heroic tier, they must establish their village and help it grow. The Q'barran frontier is a lawless place, and the adventurers have to help maintain the peace. They might have to repel Poison Dusk attacks, maintain the uneasy peace with the dragonborn clan, and expose human bandits trying to pin their crimes

Elemental Grounding

Eberron dragonshards are a repository for mystical energy. While buried and encased in their geodes, the energy of shards is shielded. When the raw shards are removed from the geodes and gathered together, the stockpile can serve as an anchor point to divert elemental energy away from an intended target. Whether the attempt succeeds or fails, it can be done only once within an hour; a second attempt destroys the shards.

Elemental Grounding **Single-Use Terrain**

You divert elemental energy into the raw dragonshards.

Immediate Interrupt

Trigger: You are in a square targeted by a close or area attack that causes acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage. Dawn shards can absorb radiant damage; dusk shards can absorb necrotic damage.

Requirement: You must be within 1 square of a cache of raw dragonshards.

Check: Arcana check (hard DC; trained characters only).

Success: You reduce the damage caused by the attack by half the Arcana check $result. This protects all creatures targeted by the attack. Attempting to divert energy a second time within an hour causes the shards to explode, dealing 10 damage per tier in a close burst 1 centered on the shard cache.

Failure: You are dazed until the end of your next turn, and the triggering attack automatically hits you.

Dragon's Breath Geodes

Eberron dragonshards are repositories for pure magical energy. Most shards are stable and entirely safe to handle. However, occasionally, because of manifest zones or planar convergences, dragonshards vaporize into an unstable gas. Under normal conditions, this gas is released only when the geode is cracked, and thus poses a threat only to prospectors. However, the use of certain types of power in the vicinity of such a shard can trigger an explosive burst. Prospectors refer to this blast as "dragon's breath."

A dragon's breath geode responds to powers that have the arcane, divine, psionic, primal, and shadow keywords, or which deal fire, lightning, necrotic, psychic, or thunder damage. The DM, of course, can rule that any specific power does or does not activate it. Whenever an attack of the appropriate type is used in or targets a square containing a dragon's breath geode, there is a 50/50 chance that the geode detonates.

Effect: A detonating dragon's breath geode produces a close burst 1 effect centered on the geode's square. Damage varies with the size and power of the geode, from 5 for a small geode up to 30 for a very large one. (Damage should be doubled at paragon tier and tripled at epic tier.) A character or creature who makes a successful Arcana or Acrobatics check (hard DC) takes only half damage.

A character trained in Arcana can spend a minor action to sense the presence of a dragon's breath geode. An Arcana check (medium DC) reveals that one or more dragon's breath geodes are within 2 squares of the character's location; an Arcana check (hard DC) reveals the exact square or squares containing the geodes.

The detonation of a dragon's breath geode destroys any raw Eberron shards within the burst.

Use: A dragon's breath geode adds a potentially deadly surprise to the Q'barran wilderness. Lizardfolk of the Cold Sun Federation plant dragon's breath geodes near chokepoints in their defenses. Lizardfolk invokers and shamans use area attacks to trigger these geodes when enemies are in optimal positions.

on the scales. Riedrans or House Tharashk might want to establish an outpost in the village—do the adventurers approve of these things? And what about the nearby demon ruins? When demons or undead menace the village, can the adventurers find the source and cleanse the taint?

Moving into paragon, the adventurers could be faced with full-scale war. When King Sebastes gives Tharashk a free rein, the house moves into the region with a full force of monstrous mercenaries. The dragonborn respond to this invasion with full fury. Can the village survive the conflict? The epic tier can bring in the ancient history of the region: the dragon Rhashaak and the overlord Malsvirik. When the Cold Sun rises once more, can the adventurers overcome the ancient evil? If Newthrone falls, could the humble village the characters helped found become the heart of the new kingdom?

Although a Q'barran village could serve as an anchor point for a campaign, this doesn't mean that the entire campaign would take place in Q'barra. Adventurers might go to the Five Nations to negotiate with patriarchs of the dragonborn houses. They could venture east to Sarlona to pursue Riedran criminals, or up to Lhazaar as a result of pirate raids. Marauding aberrations could draw them down into the depths of Khyber, revealing horrors far beneath their village. A character's former life could come back to haunt him or her, and perhaps he or she needs to return home to settle debts. When Malsvirik is rising, the key to facing the overlord could lie in the Demon Wastes or distant Argonnessen. The village might be the heart of the campaign, but adventures could span the world and the planes.

Champions of Industry

The Five Nations need dragonshards, and the scales are standing in the way of progress. The superstitious beliefs of the lizardfolk don't put gold in an adventurer's purse, and the fact of the matter is that these inhuman creatures have attacked citizens of a Thronehold nation. A capable team of adventurers with ties to the dragonmarked houses are brought in to perform dirty jobs that King Sebastes won't approve. Hunting down lizardfolk saboteurs or sabotaging independent miners—it's all in a day's work.

Now the ritual war of Ka'rhashan is approaching, which means the greatest warriors of the dragonborn clans will be at the holy city . . . and the guard will be weak at the demonic ruins. Tharashk intelligence has determined that a massive cache of dragonshards is in one of these ancient ruins. The team has a week to get in, get the shards, and get out. Any dragonborn that are encountered have to be eliminated: This undertaking cannot be traced back to the house.

The life of a house mercenary can be a profitable one. If the adventurers learn about the reasons the lizardfolk protect the shards, will they care? If their actions release demons and rakshasa into Q'barra, will they clean up the mess or take their earnings back to the Five Nations?

More information about the natives of Q'barra and threats from the Age of Demons will be provided in an upcoming article.

Strikeforce: Sarlona

The Riedrans have their own agenda in the jungles. People interested in exploring a different side of the action could play a team of special operatives from Riedra, sent to pursue the interests of the Inspired. Shifters, humans, and changelings are all solid choices for a Riedran force. It makes sense for such a force to focus on psionic power, but there's room for a shifter ranger or fighter, or a cunning changeling rogue. Such a team could engage in the same sort of actions as mercenaries in service of a dragonmarked house, but they could also focus on intrigue in Newthrone: coming up with ways to turn Sebastes against the scales, or strengthening Riedran influence in the city. Perhaps the Inspired want to replace the local thieves' guild with a smugglers' order better suited to their purposes; the characters are the troubleshooters who step in and shift the balance of this mob war.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of Dungeons & Dragons® since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the *Eberron Campaign Setting* and *Shadows of the Last War,* he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

Vanguard Tower

An adventure for 4th-level characters

✦ *by Rob Wieland* ✦

illustration by Wayne England
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CHAOS SCAR™

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"Vanguard Tower" is a short adventure for five 4th-level characters. As the adventurers are going about their business, they learn that a beholder has taken captured rust monsters to a tower for an unknown purpose, and their goal is to find out what's going on at the tower and deal with the beholder. The tower was held originally by the bandit group called the Cats of Thleen. Will the heroes discover and prevent the exchange of a rust monster to a gnoll tribe? And what do they find in the tower if they succeed?

Many adventurers come to the Chaos Scar looking for lost treasure, powerful magic, and vicious monsters to defeat. The Scar has all three in copious amounts, and some seek to make a profit by turning a negative into a positive—for them if nobody else. The beholder gauth named Shur-Tuuz is one such profiteer.

Background

Many adventurers come to the Chaos Scar looking for lost treasure, powerful magic, and vicious monsters to defeat. The Scar has all three in copious amounts, and some seek to make a profit by turning a negative (captured creatures such as rust monsters or the last known location of a missing band of would-be heroes) into a positive—for them if nobody else. The beholder gauth named Shur-Tuuz is one such profiteer, and its recent efforts have seen it lead a group of duergar to the tower, where it also hopes to profit by selling a couple of rust monsters to a band of local gnolls. The beholder already has the duergars' payment for the information; now it seeks to gain payment for the rust monsters.

After the beholder arrived at the location with the band of duergar, they all discovered that the tower hadn't had inhabitants for a few months. Seeing another opportunity, Shur-Tuuz sent its runner off to the gnolls, but also sent another back to one of its usual haunts to gather more forces. It wants to keep the tower as another base of operations. Thus far, Shur-Tuuz has succeeded at its endeavors to sell information and various "found" goods, and this tower could serve as a useful location for it. Storing vicious creatures in some of its bases is not convenient; this place, however, is far enough out that it can consider selling more dangerous creatures than rust monsters.

Unfortunately for Shur-Tuuz, a local druid saw its band heading toward the tower, plus the rust monsters, and she quickly made it known to contacts that something was going on at the tower. How this news reaches the ears of the adventurers is up to the DM (see some hooks below for ideas), but the druid and other folk are not happy with the idea of having a beholder in that tower, and they don't appreciate the presence of rust monsters in the area. The heroes might also know the former inhabitants of the tower and seek to discover what happened to them. Whatever the case, they arrive as the negotiations for the rust monsters are taking place.

Hooking the Characters

"Vanguard Tower" takes place in the Chaos Scar. Use of one the following hooks to bring your characters into conflict with the new lord of Vanguard Tower.

Not Rust Monsters!: A druid who lives in the area of the tower saw the rust monsters being taken to the tower by the beholder. She made this information known to friends of hers in various towns, and one of these friends approaches the heroes. He or she wants to alleviate the concerns the druid has about the rust monsters. Perhaps the druid finished handling a rust monster menace elsewhere and wishes to prevent this from happening again—but the beholder and its duergar entourage are beyond her ability to handle.

Old Friends: The heroes could know any of the Vanguard Tower inhabitants. Artemeque Labruinn, the leader of the Cats of Thleen, could be an old friend of any unaligned heroes or the foe of any good heroes. Zagira could be a mentor to an arcane hero. Quillburn might have consulted on an arcane riddle or offered dungeoneering advice. The heroes receive word many months after the fact that their old friend has built Vanguard Tower and is looking for adventurers to help tame the Scar. The heroes can use the tower as a base of operations for their adventures. When they reach the location, though, they stumble across the beholder and its negotiations.

Major Quest: Stop the Beholder

The characters must kill the rust monsters and find out what the beholder is doing in the tower. If all else fails, killing the beholder works, too, without finding out anything as to its purpose for being there.

Quest XP: 200 per character.

A Noble Experiment: A scholar studying the strange chaos metal wants to know the effect it has on rust monsters. Can they digest it? Does it mutate them like other creatures? The adventurers are put on the trail of a pair of rust monsters that leads them to the forest. The trail ends at the tower, so someone inside must have the rust monsters.

Shur-Tuuz Must Pay: An ally of the heroes has been targeted by assassins. The heroes tracked down the source of the betrayal to Shur-Tuuz. The spies in the beholder's employ have caused many setbacks in the lives of those who are looking to restore order to the wild lands of the Chaos Scar. If Shur-Tuuz were eliminated, the heroes would take one step closer to victory.

The Tower

Formerly the base for the Cats of Thleen, the tower is being used for different purposes now. Both the original purpose and the current condition of each floor are described below to allow DMs to use the tower for more than the adventure at hand. See "Using Vanguard Tower as a Hook" for more information on the tower's backstory.

Top Floor (An Interrupted Negotiation): Artemeque Labruinn, the leader of the Cats of Thleen, came to the Chaos Scar, realizing its potential as a base of operations. He reserved the top floor for himself as a library, where he would carefully plan the Cats' next big heist. Over the years, he has collected information about the Scar and those interested in it. Someday, he hopes that selling this collection of lore will allow him to retire. Currently the room is the location where the gnoll and beholder are meeting to make the exchange.

Middle Floor (Snake Charmers): Zagira, a dragonborn mystic, accompanied Artemeque to the area. The mystic spends most of her time studying the meteor, because she seeks to harness its power. Zagira took over the middle floor of the tower, though she is rarely there. Instead, she wanders the Scar seeking out the strange interaction between the metal and arcane energy. When she first arrived, she turned her floor into a series of interconnected teleportation wards to allow the Cats to teleport to any one of their

Using Vanguard Tower as a Hook

If you have time to set it up beforehand, Vanguard Tower makes an excellent base of operations for a Chaos Scar campaign. Labruinn and the Cats of Thleen can act as allies that provide a safe shelter in between encounters and serve as a source of rumors and research. This group of bandits walks the fine line between being folk heroes and outlaws. A person must have ended at least nine lives to join the Cats. The group targets the rich and others they believe can stand to lose some gold pieces, but they don't always give to the poor. In essence, the Cats of Thleen serve themselves first and others second.

They understand the importance of allies, however, so they do a good job of staying in the good graces of the common folk. The Cats live simply in the woods, but every month they take a chunk of their ill-gotten gains and spread them around the nearest town. Innkeepers and blacksmiths aren't likely to sell out rogues if they want to stay well-paid. Also, those willing to pursue the thieves into the dangerous Scar are either foolhardy enough to get themselves killed or brave enough the Cats might want them as part of the gang.

If not allies, the Cats of Thleen could also be friendly rivals, spurring the heroes to greater deeds through competition and the quest for bragging rights. They might ride to your heroes' aid in case an encounter goes poorly—but demand payment for their efforts.

Today, nobody knows what happened to the Cats of Thleen. Their activities dropped off dramatically a few months ago, so now people suspect that something has happened to them. Some believe that creatures of the Chaos Scar might have overtaken them. Others think that the law might have finally caught up with them. Some, though, wonder if they might have moved on to easier lands to pillage. A couple of folk speculate that the Cats could still be hiding out in the forest, waiting for the word from Artemeque to strike.

As an alternative to rumors of the disappearance of the Cats, a relatively recent attack on the tower makes for an excellent cliffhanger. Imagine the heroes, flush with gold and treasure, returning to Vanguard Tower to talk of their latest triumph. Perhaps before they reach the doors they stumble across the body of one of the Cats, which gives them warning that something isn't right. Before they approach the tower, if the session was nearing its end anyway, you could give the players enough clues to have them realize that the haven they thought was safe for their characters is not—then end the session.

bases hidden within the forest. Today, several gnolls plus their snake pets are keeping watch on this floor while the negotiations take place on the floor above them.

Ground Floor (Ambush in the Dark): The third Cat, Jorg Quillburn, is a dwarf expert of elemental earth magic. Quillburn's elementals built the tower, and Quillburn chose to take over the base floor of the tower and make it into an art gallery of sorts. He likes to sculpt statues in his spare time, using his mastery of stone to create works of art. His last big score was stealing an artifact from the duergar and hiding it in one of his sculptures. Several duergar, who are here thanks to the beholder's information, are attempting to locate the item.

Shur-Tuuz

Shur-Tuuz likes to acquire information, items, and creatures to sell to others, and he has a small customer base built up already. If you, as the DM, already have an organization in place that would find Shur-Tuuz useful, consider having Shur-Tuuz be an agent of that organization with a clientele that he gained from his affiliation with the organization. Otherwise, the beholder is an entrepreneur who started successfully building up his own business just over a year ago. Regardless of where you decide Shur-Tuuz fits in your campaign, though, he believes that the information in the tower will add to his profits in some manner and intends to start going through the library that the Cats have acquired.

The Gnolls

The gnolls are recent clients of Shur-Tuuz, and they just established a foothold in an area that the adventurers haven't yet explored, or perhaps they're taking over an area that the adventurers have already cleared. After all, when one menace vanishes, another one might appear to take its place.

Treasure

The following treasure parcels can be found in Vanguard Tower. The magic items should be useful to your characters and themed to the fallen heroes that built the tower.

Parcel 1: 8 gold circlets (worth 50 gp each), 20 gp	**Ambush in the Dark**
Parcel 2: Level 5 magic item, alexandrite (worth 50 gp), 40 gp	**Snake Charmers**
Parcel 3: Level 7 magic item	**An Interrupted Negotiation**

Getting Started

Read or paraphrase the following when the adventurers reach the base of Vanguard Tower:

The rectangular tower juts out of the ground, combining natural and structured features in unusual ways. Its sides are like craggy rock faces rather than smooth chiseled stone. Windows in the sides of the structure look like natural alcoves, yet the sun glints off glass set within each alcove. Two large doors at the base of the tower open into darkness, and the sounds of pick and shovel on stone echo within the structure.

The tower is 50 feet tall, and the other floors can be accessed through windows (DC 15 Climb check to reach each window). Coming in through the windows will change the order of the encounters but have no effect on the encounters themselves. In fact, if the heroes think to peer into the windows, feel free to give them a preview of the monsters inside the tower.

Conclusion

The heroes might wish to use the tower as a base of operations for their further adventures in the Chaos Scar. The characters can shore up the physical defenses easily and use it as a place to store their treasure. The adventurers might also wish to seek out the history of those who lived in the tower before them and complete any unfinished business. The fate of the Cats of Thleen is left open. Perhaps they were killed, or perhaps they retreated to another hideout with grander treasures hidden away.

On the other hand, the heroes might believe the tower has been corrupted too thoroughly. Destroying the tower can be as simple as a ritual discovered in the library or as involved as putting the ghost of Jorg Quillburn or another Cat of Thleen to rest.

If the journals survived the encounter on the top floor, they are an excellent source of maps, cryptic entries, and encoded pages leading to other adventures in the Scar or wherever the heroes turn their attention next.

The beholder gauth is also an excellent link to another adventure. The gauth could have been an agent of an enemy the heroes have already made. The beholder could also be a pawn sacrificed to see how much of a threat the heroes are becoming. Additionally, the gnolls that meet with the beholder brought a magic item as payment for the rust monster. Whoever owned that item originally will probably want it back.

About the Author

Rob Wieland writes about pirates, gangsters, Jedi, and dragons. He would like to thank everyone who ever spent time in his basement, cramped apartments, and dining room helping him tell stories over dice and pizza. He lives in scenic Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is honored to be working on the granddaddy of them all: Dungeons & Dragons.

Ground Floor: Ambush in the Dark

Encounter Level 4 (850 XP)

Setup

2 duergar guards (G)
3 duergar miners (M)
2 duergar scouts (S)

The duergar are chipping away at the corrupted stones that make up the tower. The Cats of Thleen took something from them before they went missing, and the duergar are tearing the room apart to bring it back home. Anyone pausing to listen to them talk in Deep Speech can hear that they're searching for an item of importance to them.

Read the following when the heroes enter the room, either through the main doors or through one of the windows around the tower:

The base of the tower is a mess. What was once a welcoming area is now little more than a junk room. Smashed statues litter the floor. Beautiful tapestries lie tattered on the ground or have been used to tie off rough mining equipment.

The guttural chatter drops off suddenly. The sound of work comes to a stop, replaced by a slow rhythmic thumping. Duergar mash their tools on the ground, creating a deafening beat in the room.

Suddenly, the windows seal close and the doors slam shut. The only thing you hear is the angry pounding. The only thing you see in the darkness is the glow of seven pairs of eyes.

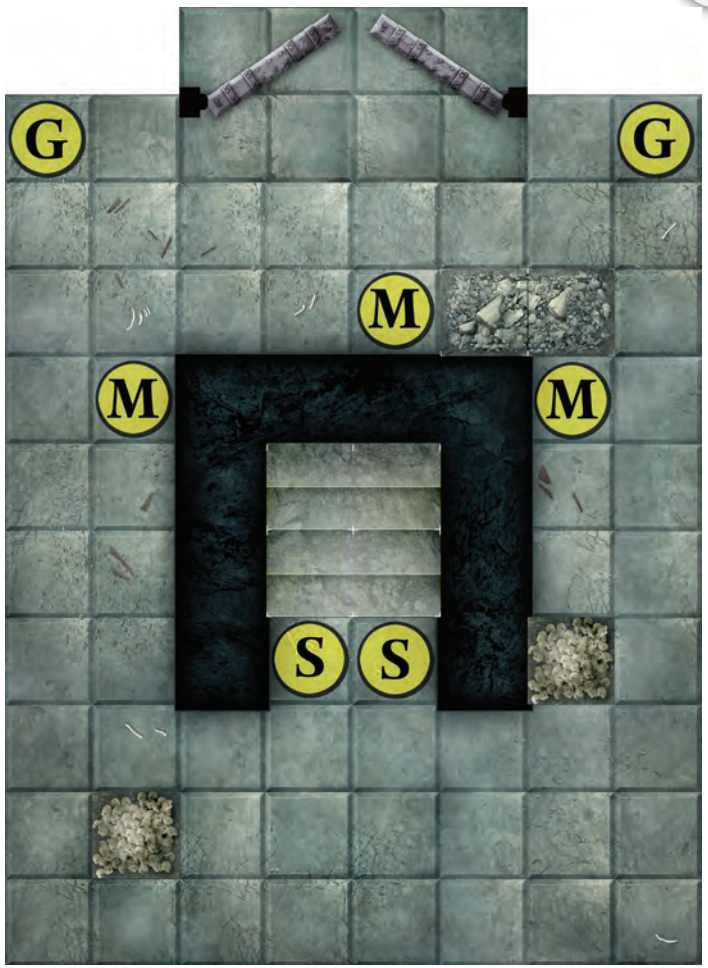
Tactics

The duergars' limited knowledge of elemental magic allows them to control this room of the tower and turn it to their advantage. By shutting the doors and sealing the windows, the room is entirely enclosed in darkness and swings the encounter space into favoring the duergar.

The guards engage the heroes as close to their entry point as possible. They try to keep the scouts free to rain down ranged attacks on their opponents. If the miners have been eliminated, the guards concentrate their attacks on any heroes bearing a light source, but they do not break off to close the doors if they are open.

If the adventurers draw their own illumination devices, such as torches or sunrods, the miners attack the individuals bearing a light source. If a light source is dropped on the floor, one of the duergar miners moves to pick up the item and bury it in one of the rock piles with a minor action. If the miner places it in the rock pile, the light source is considered extinguished.

The duergar scouts do their best to stay to the shadows and use their *underdark sneak* and *shadow attack*. They engage the heroes at range and try to keep the long hallways between themselves and the heroes. They target any heroes with ranged abilities first, then heroes with light sources.



Features of the Area

Illumination: None. The heroes can force the doors open to allow some light in the room. Breaking open the doors requires a DC 17 Dungeoneering check. If the doors are opened, the only squares still bathed in darkness are the ones behind the stairs leading up to the next level.

Rock Piles: The piles of rocks are considered difficult terrain. The treasure parcel is hidden under the 10-by-5 foot pile.

2 Duergar Guards (G) **Level 4 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 175 each**

HP 58; **Bloodied** 29 **Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15 **Perception** +4
Speed 5 Darkvision
Resist 5 fire, 5 poison

Standard Actions

⊕ **Warhammer** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage.
Effect: The duergar guard marks the target until the end of the target's next turn.

Minor Actions

Infernal Anger (fire) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Effect: Until the start of the guard's next turn, its melee attacks deal 4 extra fire damage, and if an enemy adjacent to the guard moves, the guard can shift 1 square as an immediate reaction.

⊗ **Infernal Quills** (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 3 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

Skills Dungeoneering +9
Str 14 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 18 (+6) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Alignment evil
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
Equipment chainmail, warhammer

3 Duergar Miners (M) **Level 5 Minion Brute**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 50 each**

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +3
AC 20, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 17 **Perception** +4
Speed 5 Darkvision
Resist 5 fire, 5 poison

Standard Actions

⊕ **Warhammer** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.

Skills Dungeoneering +9
Str 17 (+5) **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 20 (+7) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 7 (+0)
Alignment evil
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
Equipment chainmail, warhammer

2 Duergar Scouts (S) **Level 4 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 175 each**

HP 48; **Bloodied** 24 **Initiative** +8
AC 18, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16 **Perception** +9
Speed 5 Darkvision
Resist 5 fire, 5 poison

Traits

Shadow Attack
The duergar scout's attacks deal 4d6 extra damage when the scout hits a target that cannot see it.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Warhammer** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage.

⊗ **Crossbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage.

Underdark Sneak ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The scout becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until it hits or misses with an attack.

Minor Actions

⊗ **Infernal Quills** (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 3 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

Skills Dungeoneering +9, Stealth +9
Str 13 (+3) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 18 (+6) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Alignment evil
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarven
Equipment chainmail, warhammer, crossbow

Middle Floor: Snake Charmers

Encounter Level 4 (900 XP)

Setup

Gnoll war fang (W)
2 deathpledged gnolls (G)
5 spitting cobras (C)

The gnolls brought the cobras with them and watch them move in the hallway. The deathpledged do not move—they are ready to die for their leader at a moment's notice. The five spitting cobras wait in the hall: two on either side of the stairs and one directly in front. Before the encounter, one snake attempts to sneak past the heroes by making a DC 14 Stealth check. A failed check triggers the encounter.

Read the following when the heroes enter the room, either up the stairs or through one of the windows around the tower, or when a snake fails a Stealth check:

Numerous hisses echo though the halls of this level of the tower. A quick glance downward shows several large snakes writhing on the floor. They crawl over broken stone, cracked glass, and other broken belongings of those who once lived here.

Tactics

The spitting cobras spit at anyone coming up the stairs and then withdraw down the hallway as the gnolls advance. They try to hit as many different targets as they can before they are killed.

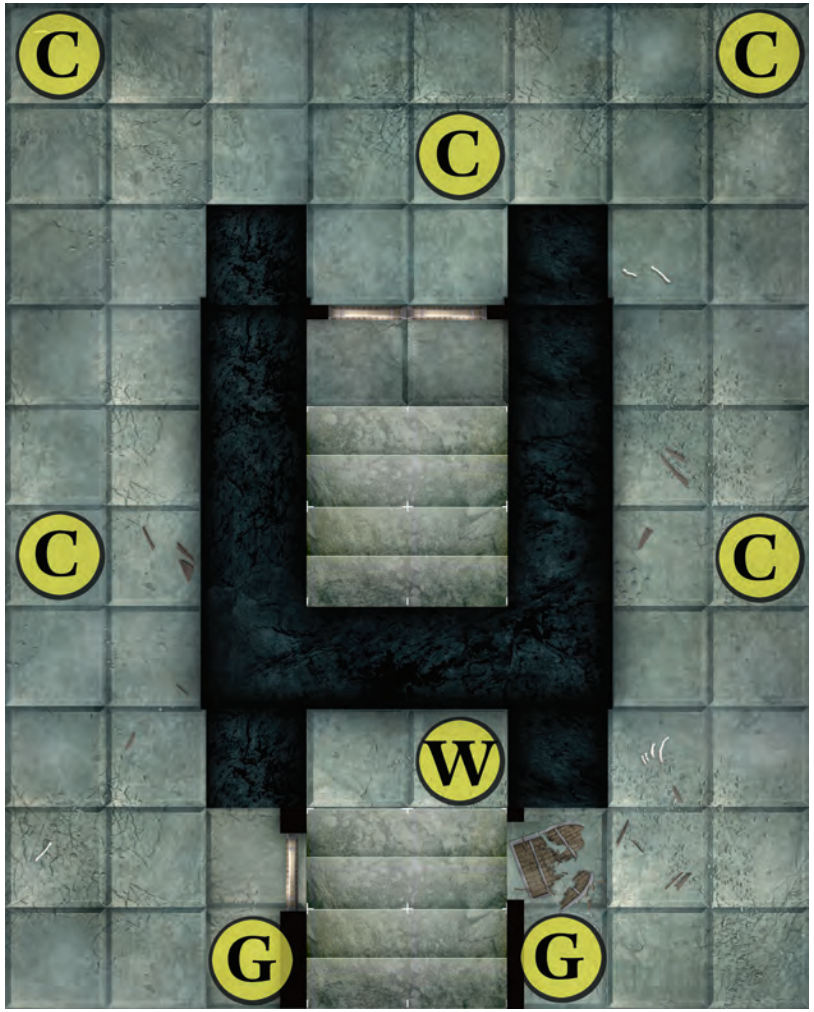
The deathpledged attack whichever hallway has fewer minions after the first round. They target any controllers first if any cobras are left.

The gnoll war fang accompanies the deathpledged gnolls, but as soon as one of the gnolls drops, it can no longer use its *pack attack* ability and should consider using the central wall teleport to single out any lone hero.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Sunrods placed along the western and eastern walls illuminate the hall.

Central Wall: The central wall is covered in strange markings. The gnoll war fang has painted similar markings on its chest. Once an encounter, it can touch the central wall and teleport to any square adjacent to it. A hero can attempt the same thing by painting sigils on a person with a DC 14 Arcana check as a standard action. Each hero can teleport once during the encounter as a move action.



Gnoll War Fang (W) **Level 6 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 250**

HP 72; **Bloodied** 36 **Initiative** +7
AC 22, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 20 **Perception** +5
Speed 7 Low-light vision

TRAITS

☼ **War Fang Defense** ✦ **Aura** 1
Allies within the aura gain a +2 bonus to AC.

Pack Attack
The war fang's melee attacks deal 5 extra damage against an enemy that has two or more gnoll allies adjacent to it.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, or 1d8 + 10 while the war fang is bloodied.

MINOR ACTIONS

Demonic Challenge (fire) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: The war fang marks one enemy within 3 squares until the end of the encounter or until the war fang uses this power again. Until the mark ends, whenever the marked enemy makes an attack that does not include the war fang as a target, the marked enemy takes 10 fire damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

No Mercy ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy misses the war fang with a melee attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): One ally adjacent to the triggering enemy can make a melee basic attack against it as a free action.

Skills Intimidate +12
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 14 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 16 (+6) **Cha** 18 (+7)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Equipment plate armor, longsword

2 Deathpledged Gnolls (G) **Level 5 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 200 each**

HP 74; **Bloodied** 37 **Initiative** +4
AC 18, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16 **Perception** +4
Speed 8 Low-light vision

TRAITS

Pack Attack
The gnoll's attacks deal 5 extra damage to any enemy that has two or more of the gnoll's allies adjacent to it.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Longspear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage, or 2d6 + 11 while the gnoll is bloodied.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Claws of Yeenoghu (healing)
Trigger: The gnoll first drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The gnoll regains 5 hit points, gains 1 action point, and gains resist 15 to all damage. At the end of its next turn, the gnoll drops to 0 hit points.

Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 9 (+1) **Cha** 7 (+0)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Equipment leather armor, light shield, longspear

5 Spitting Cobras (C) **Level 5 Minion Soldier**
Small natural beast (reptile) **XP 50 each**

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +8
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17 **Perception** +4
Speed 6, climb 6 Low-light vision

STANDARD ACTIONS

Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 6 poison damage, and the cobra marks the target until the end of the cobra's next turn.

Blinding Spittle (poison) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 6 poison damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Str 7 (+0) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Top Floor: An Interrupted Negotiation

Encounter Level 5 (1,100 XP)

Setup

Shur-Tuuz, beholder gauth (B)
Gnoll huntmaster (G)
2 rust monsters (R)

The beholder gauth is seated at the small table in the lower left hand corner. The magic item from the treasure parcel is located on the table. The beholder plans to pay Shur-Tuuz with it in exchange for one of the rust monsters Shur-Tuuz has in its possession. The beholder and gnoll are speaking in a mix of Abyssal and Deep Speech. A character would need to understand both languages to follow their conversation.

Read the following when the heroes enter the room, either up the stairs or through one of the windows around the tower:

Bookshelves line one wall of the area, and an alchemy set occupies a table near the stairs. Two rust monsters are curled up around the table. A glowing blue cage of bone surrounds the rust monsters.

You hear the sounds of speech coming from the end of the long bookshelves, but the voices are too hushed to make out the language. Seated at a small table near the shelves are two creatures. One is recognizable as a beholder, its eye stalks taking in the surroundings. The other is a gnoll with its hand on an item on the table.

If the heroes make their presence known, read the following, adjusting as needed to fit the circumstances:

As you approach, the beholder drifts away from the table and turns its attentions to you. "Perhaps a bit of a break before we continue? I'm sure you'd like a demonstration." The beholder barks a word and the bone cage clatters to the floor.

Tactics

Shur-Tuuz fights the first part of the battle to show off to its potential client. It cycles through its *eye ray* powers, but once it is bloodied, it starts playing for keeps.

The huntmaster stays out of the fight initially unless attacked. If Shur-Tuuz takes double digit damage from any attack, it convinces the huntmaster to aid it by giving the gnolls the rust monsters for free.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The fireplace offers the primary source of illumination, though sunrods in sconces along the wall also provide light around the edges of the room.

Bookshelves: The bookshelves contain journals from various adventurers as well as items that look delicious to the rust monsters. These journals are an excellent source of additional hooks and later adventurers. The bookshelves can be knocked over, dumping more food to distract the rust monsters. If a rust monster begins its turn in an overturned shelf, it spends its move action digging up small pieces of metal.

Alchemist's Table: Adventurers can find enough components in the alchemy rig to make one potion of level 5 or lower.

Blue Sigils: In addition, the blue sigils represent wards containing the rust monsters. Shur-Tuuz drops the wards at the beginning of the encounter but they can be brought back. Restoring the wards requires a DC 14 Arcana or Nature check as a standard action. The beholder automatically succeeds in restoring the wards with a minor action.

Shur-Tuuz, Beholder Gauth (B) **Level 5 Elite Artillery**
Medium aberrant magical beast **XP 400**

HP 102; **Bloodied** 51 **Initiative** +4
AC 17, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 19 **Perception** +10
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover) All-around vision, darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the gauth.

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 5 damage.

Eye Rays ✦ At-Will
Effect: The gauth uses two *eye ray* powers chosen from the list below. Each *eye ray* must target a different creature. Using *eye rays* does not provoke opportunity attacks.
1. *Fire Ray* (fire): Ranged 8; +10 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 6 fire damage.
2. *Exhaustion Ray* (necrotic): Ranged 8; +10 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).
3. *Sleep Ray* (charm): Ranged 8; +10 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is knocked unconscious instead of slowed (save ends).
4. *Telekinesis Ray:* Ranged 8; +10 vs. Fortitude; the gauth slides the target up to 4 squares.

Minor Actions

Central Eye ✦ At-Will
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +10 vs. Will
Hit: The target is immobilized until the end of the gauth's next turn.

Str 12 (+3)	**Dex** 15 (+4)	**Wis** 16 (+5)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 18 (+6)	**Cha** 20 (+7)

Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech

Gnoll Huntmaster (G) **Level 5 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 200**

HP 50; **Bloodied** 25 **Initiative** +4
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 15 **Perception** +11
Speed 8 Low-light vision

Traits

Pack Attack
The gnoll's attacks deal 5 extra damage to any enemy that has two or more of the gnoll's allies adjacent to it.

Standard Actions

Handaxe (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage, or 2d6 + 5 while the gnoll is bloodied.

Longbow (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 30 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, or 1d10 + 10 while the gnoll is bloodied.

Skills Stealth +11

Str 16 (+5)	**Dex** 19 (+6)	**Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 7 (+0)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Equipment leather armor, handaxe, longbow, 30 arrows

2 Rust Monsters (R) **Level 6 Skirmisher**
Medium natural beast **XP 250 each**

HP 66; **Bloodied** 33 **Initiative** +10
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 17 **Perception** +5
Speed 8 Low-light vision

Traits

Rusting Defense
Whenever an attack using a metal weapon hits the rust monster, the weapon used in the attack is rusting until the end of the encounter. While the weapon is rusting, attacks with the weapon take a -1 penalty to attack rolls. If the weapon used to attack the rust monster is already rusting, the penalty to attack rolls worsens by 1 (to a maximum penalty of -5).

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage. If the target is wearing heavy armor, the armor is rusting until the end of the encounter. While the armor is rusting, the target takes a -1 penalty to AC. If the target is wearing armor that is already rusting, increase the penalty to AC by 1 (to a maximum penalty of -5).
Effect: The rust monster shifts 1 square.

Devour Metal ✦ Recharge if the power misses
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature wearing or wielding a rusting item); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: The rusting item is destroyed. If the item was magical, *residuum* worth the item's market value can be retrieved from the rust monster after the creature is slain.

Str 8 (+2)	**Dex** 20 (+8)	**Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 10 (+3)	**Int** 2 (-1)	**Cha** 12 (+4)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

HEROIC
1–10

The Wayward Wyrmling

A Chaos Scar adventure for 3rd-level characters

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

illustration by Wayne England ✦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

"The Wayward Wyrmling" is a short adventure for five 3rd-level characters that takes place in the lair of an adamantine dragon in the Chaos Scar. The adamantine dragon Karonzaxus was recently slain by a powerful group of adventurers, but it left behind a single wyrmling. Fireclaw kobolds led by an ambitious wyrmpriest have moved into the abandoned lair and adopted the orphaned dragonling.

The kobolds have been training the wyrmling to be a vicious killer, providing it with humanoid training partners kidnapped from beyond the King's Wall. The characters have the opportunity to explore the dragon's lair, end the kobold menace, and perhaps rescue the adamantine wyrmling from the evil influence of the kobold wyrmpriest.

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Background

The adamantine dragon Karonzaxus was recently slain by a group of adventurers near the Chaos Scar, and tales of the mighty deed echo through the land. However, unbeknownst to the victorious adventurers, Karonzaxus was female, and had recently become the proud mother of a single male adamantine wyrmling, whom she named Taloklaxus. After the death of Karonzaxus, her killers looted her lair but did not discover the wyrmling, who was small enough to hide and avoid detection. With no choice but to fend for himself, Taloklaxus left his mother's lair in the Chaos Scar and ventured out into the world. He would certainly have been killed and eaten by a more powerful monster but instead, the first creatures he encountered were a warband of kobolds from the Fireclaw tribe. The wyrmpriest leading the group, Varza, an ambitious and progressive kobold, saw the wyrmling as a sign from Tiamat; a sign that it was time to leave her tribe and strike out on her own.

Varza persuaded her warband to join her by promising that the adamantine wyrmling was the key to future power and influence in the Chaos Scar. Needing a base of operations, Varza followed Taloklaxus's tracks back to his mother's lair, and there began instructing the wyrmling in the finer points of dragonhood. Of course, Varza wished to turn her wyrmling into a rampaging monster not unlike the chromatic dragons her kind so often serve. In order to do so, however, she needed to expunge the more peaceable inclinations common to metallic dragons from Taloklaxus's psyche. Preferring a hands-on approach, Varza and her kobolds began raiding local tribes of goblins and even rival kobold clans for suitable 'teaching aids' for Taloklaxus. Those taken by the kobolds were disarmed and forced to battle the adamantine wyrmling to the death.

Taloklaxus is not an evil creature, but it now has a child's loyalty to Varza and follows the wyrmpriest's commands. Taloklaxus believes that he must slay the helpless creatures Varza forces him to battle in order to sharpen the fighting skills he needs to defend Varza and the kobolds loyal to her. In the past few weeks, Taloklaxus's natural instincts have become more prominent, and he has begun to question Varza's commands. This has not slowed Varza's ambition, however, and she has begun to venture beyond the King's Wall to collect 'training partners' for her pet wyrmling.

Getting the Characters Involved

"The Wayward Wyrmling" takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use one of the hooks below to get the characters into the former lair of Karonzaxus.

Hook 1: Scaling Rewards

The characters are approached by a dwarven smith named Ikos Ironbelly who tells them he was recently hired by the group of adventurers responsible for slaying the great adamantine dragon Karonzaxus. The adventurers hired Ikos to craft armor from the dragon's scales, which he did. He is convinced that there are more dragon scales in Karonzaxus' lair, and he offers to pay the characters 200 gp if they can collect enough dragon scales to fashion a shield or a suit of armor. Ikos knows the location of the dragon's lair within the Chaos Scar and gives the characters a rough map if they agree to his terms.

Quest XP: 250 xp for finding enough dragon scales for Ikos to craft a shield or suit of armor.

Hook 2: Woeful Woodwives

It is fairly common knowledge that local woodcutters are crossing into the Chaos Scar to harvest the bountiful forests beyond the King's Wall. The boldest of these woodcutters, Erim Haverlan and his two grown sons, disappeared over two weeks ago, and their wives fear the worst. The wives approach the characters and ask them to enter the Chaos Scar and search the small forests near the King's Wall for their husbands. The woodcutters' wives are poor working folk, but they have managed to scrape together 50 gp to pay the characters if they can locate their husbands, dead or alive. The woodcutters' wives can provide detailed descriptions of the three missing woodcutters if the characters agree to search for them. Alternatively, the characters could be approached by the priestess Chendera, the bailiff Kendon Longstrider, or another key NPC from Restwell Keep on behalf of the wives and families of the missing woodcutters.

Quest XP: 250 xp for finding Erim and his sons, dead or alive. Award the characters an extra 50 xp if they help the woodcutter's wives free of charge.

Treasure Preparation

Characters can find three caches of treasure in the course of *The Wayward Wyrmling*. These account for treasure parcels 3, 5, and 9 (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 126).

Kobold Clearing: 80 gp
The Roaring Cavern: Two *potions of healing*
Lair of Karonzaxus: Level 5 magic item, two 100-gp gems, and 110 gp

Wrapping Up: Our Very Own Dragon!

After the characters defeat Varza, and assuming they succeeded at the Turning Taloklaxus skill challenge, they have the opportunity to gain Taloklaxus as a companion character. At that point, although Taloklaxus no longer considers the characters enemies, he doesn't yet recognize them as possible allies or friends, either. In fact, the poor wyrmling is in a profound state of emotional turmoil. The recent death of his mother and now the death of the only other creature that has ever been kind to him—even if it was self-serving—has left him confused, depressed, and unsure what to do next. The characters can reassure Taloklaxus and persuade him to join them with a simple complexity 1 skill challenge (Diplomacy, DC 10, 4 successes before 3 failures).

Normally, an adamantine wyrmling would be outside the scope of allowable companion characters; Taloklaxus is a unique case. Bereft of the parental training he would normally receive from his mother and unwilling to fall back on the brutal techniques taught to him by Varza, the wyrmling is a bit of a blank slate. The companion character stat block presented here is modified to reflect this fact. It illustrates how Taloklaxus's abilities are now stunted because of developmental and emotional trauma.

In any event, it is unlikely that Taloklaxus will remain with the characters as a companion for more than a level or two. He is a dragon, after all, and will recognize soon enough that his destiny lies elsewhere.

Taloklaxus, Adamantine Dragon Wyrmling (companion)	**Level 4 Defender**
Medium natural magical beast	XP –
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24; **Healing Surges** 11	**Initiative** +3
AC 21, Fortitude 17, Reflex 15, Will 14	**Perception** +3
Speed 5, Fly 6 (hover)	Darkvision
Resist 5 thunder	
Standard Actions	
ⓘ **Bite** (thunder) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage plus 1d6 thunder damage, and the target is marked until the end of Taloklaxus's next turn.	
ⓘ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Taloklaxus's next turn.	
Double Attack ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The dragon makes two *claw* attacks.	
Breath Weapon (thunder) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Close blast 4 (creatures in blast); +6 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d6 + 6 thunder damage.	
Skills Insight +8, plus one more of character's choice	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4)	**Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 10 (+2)
Alignment Unaligned	
Languages Common, Draconic	

About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel is a staff writer and editor for Goodman Games, a freelance writer and RPG designer, and the editor-in-chief of the 4E magazine *Level Up*. He has been a professional game designer since 2005, and his recent author credits include *Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens*, *Critter Cache: Daemons*, and *Hero's Handbook: Tiefling*. Aeryn currently lives in Modesto, California with his wife Melissa, a nongamer whose tolerance for her husband's geekery borders on the supernatural.

1: Kobold Clearing

Encounter Level 2 (XP 700)

4 kobold tunnelers (K)
4 kobold quickblades (Q)
2 mantrap patches (T)

Setup

Fearing reprisal from the rest of the Fireclaw tribe, Varza has instructed her kobolds to be vigilant for intruders and has ensured the entrance to the lair is well guarded. The kobolds improved their defenses by felling two large trees which serve as barricades and a convenient place from which to snipe at enemies. In addition, the devious humanoids have hidden a number of mantraps beneath the forest litter in the clearing. These spiked mechanical jaws can close with bone-snapping force, holding a victim in place until he or she can pry the jaws open again.

The kobolds are not expecting trouble, but Varza has commanded they be vigilant. There are currently eight kobolds hunkered down behind the two fallen trees in the clearing watching for any signs of intruders. The kobolds are taking pains to stay out of sight and have a passive Stealth check of 18. Should the characters attempt to sneak into the clearing, they must succeed at a DC 12 Stealth check to beat the kobolds' passive Perception. If the characters fail to spot the hiding kobolds, the heroes are surprised.

Read or paraphrase the following when the characters reach the clearing:

A narrow, winding path ends in a small forest clearing. The area is quite bare, containing little more than a pair of fallen trees, a shallow pool, and a small hillock at the southern end of the clearing. A cavern yawns open at the base of the hillock, and you can faintly hear the sound of rushing water from the darkness within.

When the kobolds attack, read:

Shadowy figures move behind the two fallen trees in the clearing, and the air is suddenly filled with a hail of javelins. You are under attack!

Tactics

The kobolds attack almost immediately. They won't give the characters more than a few seconds to scan the clearing before initiative is rolled—too short a time for active Perception checks. After that, characters must devote actions to making Perception checks, and the kobolds intend to keep them too busy for that.

The kobolds remain behind the fallen trees for as long as possible, peppering the characters with javelins until they run out or the characters have closed in to melee with them. Once kobolds are in melee, they use their mobility to gain advantageous positions, to threaten ranged attackers, to keep away from the most dangerous opponents, and to draw characters into the traps, if they haven't been detected already.

Note that each mantrap patch actually consists of four independently-trapped squares.

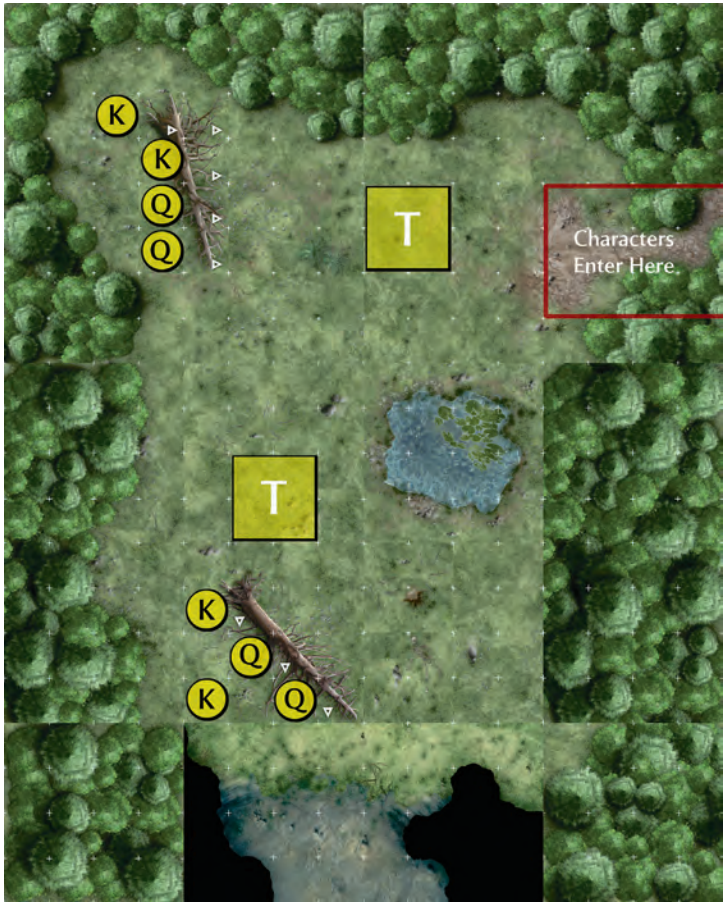
When only four kobolds remain, a single kobold tunneler tries to break away from combat. Unless the characters can prevent it, the kobold runs into the cavern to warn its friends in area 2.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Daylight.

Fallen Trees: Squares covered by the fallen trees are difficult terrain as shown. The fallen trees provide superior cover to Small creatures adjacent to them or standard cover to Medium creatures.

Pool: The small pool is 2 feet deep and is difficult terrain.



4 Kobold Tunnelers (K) **Level 1 Minion Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid, kobold XP 25 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +1
Speed 6 Darkvision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.

⊕ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will** (3/encounter)
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.

Minor Actions

Shifty ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The kobold shifts 1 square.

Triggered Actions

Narrow Escape ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: A close or an area attack hits or misses the kobold.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The kobold rolls a saving throw. If it succeeds, it shifts 3 squares.

Skills Athletics +4, Stealth +8, Thievery +8
Str 8 (-1) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment leather armor, 3 javelins

4 Kobold Quickblades (Q) **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid, kobold XP 100 each

HP 29; **Bloodied** 14 **Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +1
Speed 6 Darkvision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage. The attack deals 2 extra damage per square the kobold has shifted since the start of its turn.

Move Actions

Fleet Feet ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The kobold shifts up to 3 squares.

Minor Actions

Shifty ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The kobold shifts 1 square.

Skills Athletics +4, Stealth +8, Thievery +8
Str 8 (-1) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+1)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 9 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Equipment leather armor, light shield, short sword

2 Mantrap Patches (T) **Level 1 Minion Trap**
Object XP 100 each

Detect Perception DC 21 **Initiative** –
HP 26
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 7, **Will** –
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage

Triggered Actions

Attack ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: A creature enters a trapped square.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 0 (creature on the trapped square); +4 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 +3 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Countermeasures

✦ **Disable:** Thievery DC 12. *Success:* A single trapped square no longer functions.
✦ **Avoid:** Athletics DC determined by distance jumped. *Success:* The character jumps over the trapped squares.

2: The Roaring Cavern

Encounter Level 3 (XP 800)

4 kobold dragonshields (D)
3 kobold slingers (S)
1 kobold tunneler (K)

Setup

This small cavern is bisected by a swiftly running stream that flows south into a shaft in the cavern floor, where it plunges 20 feet before crashing into an underground lake. The falling water makes a terrible noise, and the kobolds here are all but deaf to intruders. Because of the noise, all creatures in this area suffer a -5 penalty to Perception checks. Conversation is possible only with adjacent creatures, and even then only by shouting.

If one of the kobold minions from area 1 managed to warn the kobolds in this area, they are on alert and actively looking for intruders. In that event, the kobolds here do not suffer the -5 penalty to Perception for the purpose of spotting enemies entering the cavern but have their full passive Perception score of 18. The kobolds still suffer the penalty for all other Perception checks during the encounter.

After the kobold minion from area 1 warned the kobolds in this area, it intended to move on and warn Varza and the kobolds in Karonzaxuss' lair. At the beginning of this encounter, however, the minion is still present, behind the dragonshields at the southern end of the cavern. It leaves the map at its first opportunity, so characters with high initiative scores may have a chance to kill it with a ranged attack before it can escape and warn Varza in area 3.

When the characters enter the cavern, read:

A swift, dark stream flows through the center of this lightless cavern. The water flows to the south before falling into a gaping pit in the floor and crashing down into unseen depths below. The rushing water fills the cavern with thunderous noise, leaving you all but deaf to the danger that may lurk in the darkness.

When the characters see the kobolds, read:

Six kobolds stand on the eastern side of the cavern, using the rushing stream as a natural barrier between them and you. They grip an assortment of melee and ranged weapons and look quite ready to use them.

Tactics

When combat begins, the slingers open up on the heroes with *special shot* aimed at obvious barbarians, fighters, or other melee types. The dragonshields stand their ground and wait for the characters to close for melee.

In melee, the kobold dragonshields use *dragonshield tactics* to move into flanking positions. They won't shy away from trying to bull-rush enemies into the stream or the pit if a good opportunity arises. Their main tactic, however, is to defend their side of the stream in the hope that the intruders rush across it. The slingers avoid melee when possible, using *shifty* to keep away from close combat and their ranged attacks against enemies that seem reluctant to cross the stream.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Darkness.

Ceiling: 20 feet high.

Pit: The pit is a 10-foot-wide vertical shaft, hundreds of feet deep, that eventually connects to a subterranean river. However, it is filled almost entirely with water so that the waterline is only 20 feet below the cavern floor. A character falling into the pit takes 1d10 damage. The water in the pit is quite turbulent, so that it takes a DC 15 Athletics check to tread water and stay afloat. Climbing out of the pit takes a DC 10 Athletics check.

Rubble: Squares with rubble are difficult terrain. These rubble piles are large enough to offer cover to adjacent creatures of Small size or smaller.

Rushing Stream: The stream is 3 feet deep and flowing swiftly. A character who makes an Athletics check (DC 11, or DC 21 without a running start) can leap safely across it. Any creature that enters the water suffers the following attack as an immediate reaction: +3 vs. Reflex; the target is knocked prone and is pushed 3 squares downstream toward the pit. A creature that starts its turn in the stream is pushed 3 squares downstream before it can take any other action. A prone creature in the stream must make a DC 13 Acrobatics or Athletics check. A creature dragged into the pit by the current can make a saving throw as normal to avoid falling into the water below.

4 Kobold Dragonshields (D) — **Level 2 Soldier**
Small natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 125 each

HP 36; Bloodied 18 — Initiative +4
AC 18, Fortitude 14, Reflex 13, Will 13 — Perception +2
Speed 5 — Darkvision

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage.
Effect: The kobold marks the target until the end of the kobold's next turn.

Dirty Tricks (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +5 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the kobold's next turn.
Miss: Half damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the kobold's next turn.

Minor Actions

Shifty
Effect: The kobold shifts 1 square.

Triggered Actions

Dragonshield Tactics ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the kobold shifts or an enemy moves to a square adjacent to the kobold.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The kobold shifts 1 square.

Skills Athletics +8, Stealth +7, Thievery +7

Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 13 (+2)	**Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 12 (+2)	**Int** 9 (+0)	**Cha** 10 (+1)

Alignment Evil — **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment scale armor, light shield, short sword

3 Kobold Slingers (S) — **Level 1 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid — XP 100 each

HP 24; **Bloodied** 12 — **Initiative** +3
AC 13, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6 — darkvision

Standard Actions

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage.

Sling (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage.

Special Shot (weapon) ✦ **At-Will** (3/encounter)
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage plus one of the following effects (roll a d6):
⚀ ⚁ *Stinkpot:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).
⚂ ⚃ *Firepot (fire):* The target takes ongoing 2 fire damage (save ends).
⚄ ⚅ *Gluepot:* The target is immobilized (save ends).

Minor Actions

Shifty ✦ At-Will
Effect: The kobold shifts 1 square.

Skills Stealth +8

Str 9 (-1)	**Dex** 17 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 12 (+1)	**Int** 9 (-1)	**Cha** 10 (+0)

Alignment Evil — **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment leather armor, dagger, sling, 20 sling bullets, 3 rounds of special shot

3: Lair of Karonzaxus

Encounter Level 5 (XP 1,175)

3 kobold tunnelers (K)
3 kobold quickblades (Q)
Taloklaxus (T)
Varza (V)

Setup

This cavern was once the lair of the adamantine dragon Karonzaxus. It has become in many ways a prison for her offspring, the adamantine wyrmling Taloklaxus.

When the characters enter the cavern, read:

A slow-moving stream flowing west to east divides this large cavern in half. At first glance, the water looks shallow enough to simply wade across. In the southwestern portion of the room, the skeleton of a large dragon lies curled nose to tail. Only shreds of flesh and scales still cling to its bones.

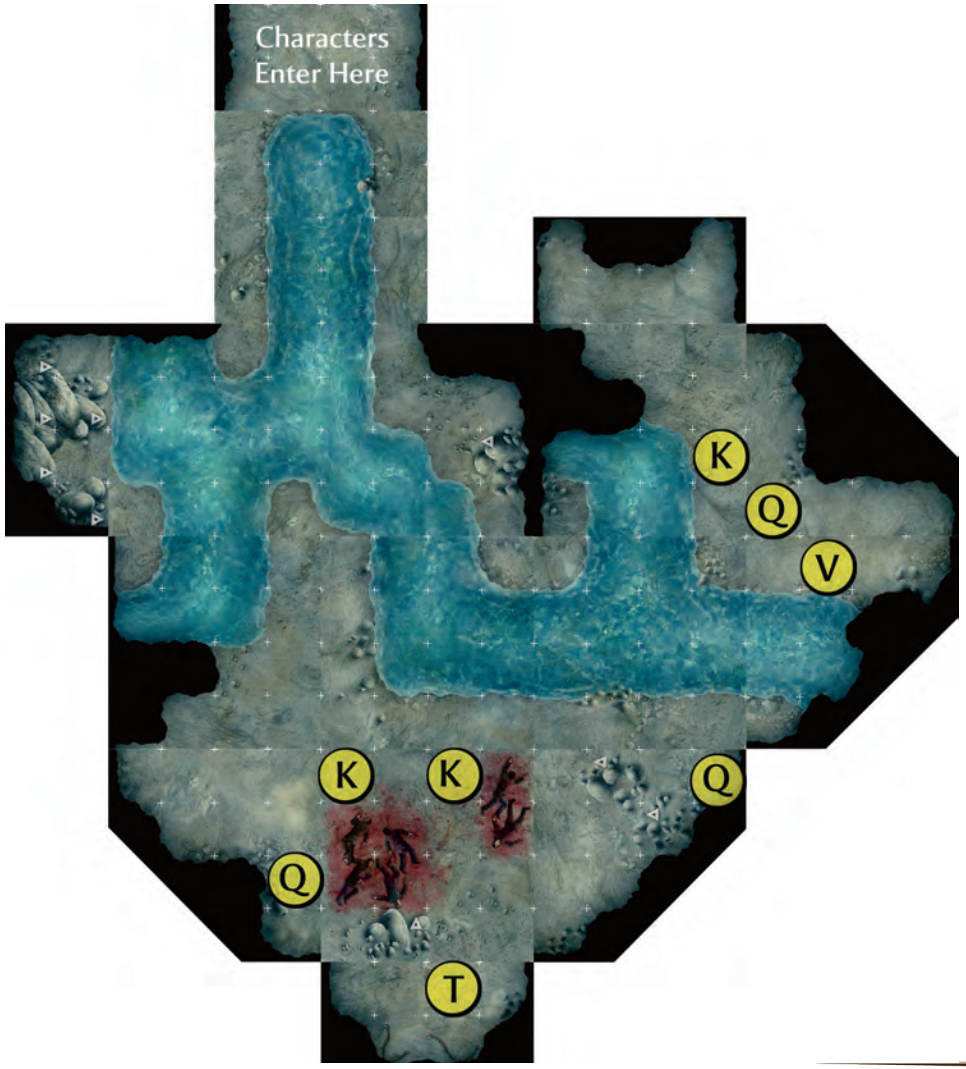
Varza has been forcing Taloklaxus to fight and kill unarmed humanoids from local goblin and kobold tribes, and recently, she has been kidnapping innocent travelers from beyond the King's Wall to further sharpen Taloklaxus's fighting skills.

Taloklaxus felt no remorse about slaying the goblins, kobolds, and other evil humanoids he was initially forced to battle. However, killing the humans and other civilized folk Varza captured from beyond the King's Wall has brought about feelings of remorse, leaving the wyrmling confused and depressed. He is for the moment still Varza's creature, however, and follows her commands.

When the characters see Taloklaxus, read:

In the southern end of the room, near the bloodstained corpses of several humans, crouches a dragon the size of a large wolf. Its scales are a dull, iron gray and its large head is armed with a formidable beak. It does not stir when you enter, and only the whip-crack screech of a kobold voice to the east manages to push it reluctantly to its feet.

When the characters see Taloklaxus, they can make a DC 10 Nature check to recognize him as an adamantine wyrmling. This check is sufficient to tell them that adamantine dragons are not usually evil and do not normally associate with kobolds.



When the characters see kobolds, read:
The dragonling is not the only danger in this cavern. Over half a dozen kobolds lurk in the shadows, including a tall, gray-scaled specimen shouting orders to the other kobolds in the rasping Draconic tongue.

The kobolds here may be expecting trouble if the kobold tunneler from area 2 was able to warn them of the characters' presence. If this happens, add an additional kobold tunneler to this encounter. Even if they received no warning, the kobold tunnelers and quickblades in the southern end of the cavern are watching the entrance to this area, and the characters need a Stealth check of 12 to enter without being noticed. If they are carrying a light source, the kobolds will notice them automatically in the darkness.

Once combat begins, Varza shouts commands to Taloklaxus in Draconic from the eastern side of the cavern, urging the wyrmling to slay the intruders. Taloklaxus, however, is racked by guilt over the humans he killed recently, and so fights only halfheartedly. Until it becomes bloodied, the dragon has a –4 penalty on all of its damage rolls.

Every turn on which Taloklaxus attacks a player character, allow that character to attempt a DC 13 Insight check. If the check succeeds, the character realizes that the wyrmling is holding back on its attacks. Once a character has succeeded at one of these Insight checks, the characters can attempt the Turning Taloklaxus skill challenge to win Taloklaxus over to their side against Varza. Let the players come up with this idea on their own! Don't just tell them, "now you can try a skill challenge."

Turning Taloklaxus Skill Challenge

Level 5 (XP 400)

The characters must convince Taloklaxus his true enemies are Varza and her kobold minions.

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Special: Any character that speaks Draconic gains a +2 bonus to all primary skill checks made as part of this skill challenge.

Once the skill challenge begins, it is imperative that the characters keep up their arguments to Taloklaxus. On any round that the characters do not attempt a primary skill check, they earn one failure.

Once a character damages Taloklaxus on a given round, all subsequent skill checks made as part of this skill challenge during that round suffer a -2 penalty.

Primary Skills: Diplomacy, Intimidate.

Diplomacy (DC 13, standard action; 1 success, no maximum): By appealing to the wyrmling's intellect and sense of reason, you try to convince him the kobolds do not have his best interests at heart.

Intimidate (DC 21, standard action; 1 success, no maximum): Your words carry a subtle threat. You try to convince the wyrmling that fighting you can only result in pain and death.

Secondary Skills: Nature, Religion.

Nature (DC 13, minor action; no successes): You have a keen understanding of dragonkind, and your knowledge can help your companions choose the right words to sway the adamantine wyrmling. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Diplomacy or Intimidate check made as part of this skill challenge.

Religion (DC 21, minor action, no successes): You invoke the name of Bahamut, the great platinum dragon and father to all metallic dragons to lend weight to the words and actions of your companions. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Diplomacy or Intimidate check made as part of this skill challenge.

Success: The characters persuade Taloklaxus that they are not his enemies, and his true enemies are the kobolds who forced him to commit atrocities unworthy of an adamantine dragon. How fully he joins in the fight depends on how many failures the characters scored during the skill challenge.

- 0 Failures: the dragon is enraged. He fights as an ally and causes full damage with his attacks.
- 1 Failure: the dragon switches sides but is still confused. He fights as an ally but with a –4 penalty on his damage rolls.
- 2 Failures; the dragon is even more confused than before. He takes wing and tries to fly out of the cavern without attacking anyone. Characters will find him curled up outside after the fight.

Failure: If the characters fail to persuade Taloklaxus that they are not his enemies, his confusion turns to blind rage. He attacks the characters with furious aggression and causes full damage with his attacks. The heroes must fight the wyrmling and may be forced to kill him.

Tactics

In the first round of combat, the kobold tunnelers hurl their javelins at characters, while the kobold quickblades use nearby rubble to hide. Taloklaxus waits for the characters to cross the stream before attacking, while Varza waits for the characters to engage Taloklaxus, then opens up with *sonic orb*, targeting likely spellcasters.

In melee, the kobold quickblades team up on a single character, using *quick blade* each round to gain flanking positions and to boost their damage. The tunnelers use similar tactics, relying on *shifty* and *narrow escape*. Taloklaxus engages the heroes reluctantly and fights halfheartedly, pulling some of the power from his melee attacks (-4 penalty to damage rolls). He focuses his attacks against characters wearing the heaviest armor, hoping that the armor will turn aside his claws and teeth. He is still too young and inexperienced to realize that his adamantine claws slice easily through armor (the reason why his attacks all target Reflex rather than AC). Taloklaxus does use *double attack* each round, because he knows how Varza expects him to fight. He does not use his breath weapon until he is bloodied.

If the characters fail the Turning Taloklaxus skill challenge, then the adamantine wyrmling fights with every ounce of his ability, coordinating with kobold allies and using his breath weapon as often as possible.

While the characters are fighting Taloklaxus, Varza continues to attack them from afar with *sonic orb*. If any of the kobold quickblades is bloodied, she uses *incite faith* to bolster their hit points of and allow them to move into more advantageous positions. Varza uses her breath weapon if one or more characters close into melee range and uses her action point to finish off a seriously wounded character with another *sonic orb*. She resorts to melee only when there is no other option, and happily sacrifices one of her kobold tunnelers to keep the characters busy while her breath weapon recharges.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Darkness.

Ceiling: 20 feet high.

Corpses: There are six fresh corpses in the southern end of the chamber. They have all been killed by Taloklaxus and bear wounds one would expect from the teeth, claws, and breath weapon of an adamantine dragon. Careful examination of the corpses reveals that three match the descriptions of the missing woodcutters in the Woeful Woodwives hook. Squares with corpses are difficult terrain.

Dragon Skeleton: The remains of Karonzaxus lie tumbled in a bony heap against the wall in the southwest corner of the cavern. Her body has been reduced to little more than a skeleton by the adventurers that slew her and the kobolds that now reside in her lair. In their haste to butcher their prize, Karonzaxus's killers left a large number of scales on the adamantine dragon's belly. Although it is a grisly task, the characters can collect enough scales for Ikos Ironbelly to work into a shield or suit of armor.

Rubble: Squares with rubble are difficult terrain. These piles are large enough to offer cover to adjacent creatures of Small size or smaller.

Stream: This stream is slow-moving, but it is 3 feet deep, which makes it difficult terrain.

Varza, Kobold Wyrmpriest — **Level 5 Elite Artillery (Leader)**
Small natural humanoid (reptile), kobold — XP 400
HP 100; **Bloodied** 50 — **Initiative** +6
AC 19, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17 — **Perception** +6
Speed 6 — darkvision
Saving Throws +2
Action Points 1

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 8 damage.

Sonic Orb (thunder) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 6 thunder damage, and the target is deafened (save ends).

Dragon Breath (thunder) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in blast); +9 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 8 thunder damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Varza's next turn.
Miss: Half damage.

Minor Actions

Incite Faith ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: One kobold ally within 10 squares of Varza gains 5 temporary hit points and can shift 1 square.

Shifty ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Varza shifts 1 square.

Skills Stealth +12, Thievery +12, Nature +11

Str 12 (+3)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 18 (+6)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 12 (+3)	**Cha** 13 (+3)

Alignment Evil — **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment hide armor, spear

3 Kobold Tunnelers (K) **Level 1 Minion Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid, kobold XP 25 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +1
Speed 6 Darkvision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.

⊕ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will** (3/encounter)
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 4 damage.

Minor Actions

Shifty ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The kobold shifts 1 square.

Triggered Actions

Narrow Escape ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: A close or an area attack hits or misses the kobold.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The kobold rolls a saving throw. If it succeeds, it shifts 3 squares.

Skills Athletics +4, Stealth +8, Thievery +8
Str 8 (-1) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment leather armor, 3 javelins

3 Kobold Quickblades (Q) **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid, kobold XP 100 each

HP 29; **Bloodied** 14 **Initiative** +5
AC 15, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +1
Speed 6 Darkvision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage. The attack deals 2 extra damage per square the kobold has shifted since the start of its turn.

Move Actions

Fleet Feet ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The kobold shifts up to 3 squares.

Minor Actions

Shifty ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The kobold shifts 1 square.

Skills Athletics +4, Stealth +8, Thievery +8
Str 8 (-1) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+1)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 9 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Equipment leather armor, light shield, short sword

Taloklaxus, Adamantine Dragon Wyrmling (T) **Level 5 Elite Soldier**
Medium natural magical beast XP 400

HP 126; **Bloodied** 63 **Initiative** +8
AC 21, Fortitude 20, Reflex 18, Will 17 **Perception** +3
Speed 5 , Fly 6 (hover) darkvision
Resist 5 thunder
Saving Throws +2
Action Points 1

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** (thunder) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage, plus 1d6 thunder damage.

⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 9 damage.

Double Attack ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The dragon makes two *claw* attacks

Breath Weapon (thunder) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Close blast 4 (all creatures in blast); +8 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d6 + 4 thunder damage.

Skills Insight +8
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Draconic

DARK·SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

The Broken Builders

by Rodney Thompson ✦ illustration by Jason A. Engle

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Athas is a dangerous world where hope dies, wilting under the burning sun. Every day, its people face starvation, slavery, and tyranny. The burnt world of Athas is literally forsaken by the gods, and there is precious little hope of respite from its dangers. Why, then, would so many of its inhabitants cling to their meager lives when promise of rebirth is not so far away? All the people of Athas need to do is finish the job that was started long ago and destroy what is left of their surroundings—clearing the rubble of a ruined world so that a new one can be raised in its place.

At least, that is what the Broken Builders believe. The Broken Builders hold firm to the belief that the destruction of Athas up to this point has been merely a precursor to an even greater change, one that will occur only when the world has been utterly and completely devastated. Once that time comes, the ruins of Athas will be brushed aside and a new, verdant, cool world built where life is good and easy.

The Broken Builders originated in Raam as an elemental-worshiping cult. Followers worshiped elemental powers of all kinds. This was one of the many religions that Ablach-Re attempted to wipe away when she had her supposed revelation. When this happened, the cultists believed that Ablach-Re was specifically targeting them, which in turn reinforced their belief that, for some reason, their city-state's ruler feared the elemental powers. The cultists fled into exile where, over the course of many generations, they came to believe that the reason Ablach-Re feared the elementals they worshiped was because, one day, elemental forces would clear away the ruins of Athas and rebuild a more perfect world. These cultists came to be known as the Broken Builders. Though the cult remains secretive, it has spread over the years so that it now has cells in each of the seven city-states.

The basic philosophy held by the Broken Builders is simple: they must do their best to ensure that the world becomes so utterly devastated that the elemental beings can fully shatter it in preparation for rebuilding Athas the way it was meant to be. Unlike most people on Athas, the Broken Builders have no quarrel with defilers. They believe that defiling magic was a flaw in the creation of the world. Flaw or not, defiling magic is reality on Athas, and although it is the reason for the sorry condition of the world, it is also a tool that the Broken Builders can use to bring about the remaking of the world by the elementals. Defiling magic will unravel Athas the way a loose string unravels a poorly-woven rug.

Furthermore, the Broken Builders believe that the world itself imprisons the elemental powers and limits their ability to remake Athas. In the Broken Builders' view of the world, those scholars who label elemental forces as chaotic bringers of destruction do so from a fundamental misunderstanding of reality: the elementals are not bent on causing destruction, they are trying to free themselves—albeit violently—in order to make a better world. Rumors from Urik tell that some of Hamanu's templars broke up a cell of Broken Builders and uncovered a plot to free a trapped elemental that has lain imprisoned since before memory.

From their beginnings as exiles from Raam, the Broken Builders have been forced to hide their true beliefs and affiliations in order to survive in the city-states. Part of what makes the Broken Builders so dangerous is that they look like anyone else; the merchant in the market, the templar, and the nobleman alike could be members of the Broken Builders. They come from all walks of life and are united only by a singular philosophy that transcends status. They aren't necessarily evil people or malicious agents of chaos. Most are intelligent citizens who see little reason to cling to a world that is devastated beyond repair; they would rather see it ended entirely and reformed anew.

The Broken Builders have little in the way of identifiable practices, though most cells do some of the same things. Broken Builders offer shelter to arcane spellcasters, including defilers, and hide them from the templars. They use what resources and influence they have to encourage arcane spellcasting of all types. Broken Builder cells often have among them elemental priests, to whom they funnel resources in order to increase the presence of elemental power in the city-states. Cells with wealthy patrons (nobles or members of the merchant houses) sometimes set up secret schools where elemental priests teach other members of the cell to harness elemental and arcane power.

More active groups of Broken Builders take a stronger hand in bringing about their goals. Some have been known to openly attack templars and other servants of the sorcerer-kings in the hope of provoking an overwhelming, destructive response. Others

have staged attacks on dune traders, merchants, and ordinary citizens in order to cause panic and set off riots. Other activities including summoning elementals in the middle of crowded areas, hunting down and attacking members of the Veiled Alliance (the Broken Builders seek the destruction of the Veiled Alliance in order to make themselves the only viable shelter for arcane spellcasters), and using rituals to call forth powerful bursts of elemental magic with the sole intent of causing as much damage as possible.

Broken Builder Cultists

Broken Builders carry no identifying marks, but their cells exist in almost every city-state. As foes, they are formidable because of their zeal and their uncanny knack for survival and escape. They scatter in all directions as soon as they earn the scrutiny of a sorcerer-king, then regroup and get back to their tasks in a matter of days.

Most cultists of the Broken Builders are everyday citizens who have been recruited or lured with promises of a better tomorrow. The recruiters tend to be sneaky and devious but charismatic people who use their talent for deception and persuasion to bolster the cult's numbers. Many of these recruiters receive psionic training from schools of the Way. Such training is paid for by noble patrons of the Broken Builders. Students learn to psionically disguise themselves and their movements.

Defilers are lured to the Broken Builders by the same sense of acceptance and offer of resources that draws preservers to the Veiled Alliance. The Broken Builders don't just allow defilers to destroy the land in order to produce their potent spells, they actually encourage the use of the very defiling magic that probably caused these defilers to become outcasts in the first place.

Lore

History (DC 20): The Broken Builders are a group of troublemakers and malcontents who are bent on the destruction of the world. They worship elemental powers and have no qualms about allowing defiling magic to be used in their presence. Most Broken Builders are ordinary citizens that have been recruited into the cult. They believe that, once the world is fully destroyed, it will be reshaped into a paradise by elemental forces. They possess the raw belief of zealots and the cunning of the Veiled Alliance. The cult has remained hidden from the templars of the various city-states since its arising and exile from Raam long ago.

Encounters

Broken Builder cultists often ally themselves with unwitting inhabitants of the city-states. They pretend to be normal citizens and even members of other organizations, all the while tricking their unsuspecting allies into doing things that further the goals of the cult. Additionally, the Broken Builders frequently ally themselves with elementals that roam the wastes of Athas, or tame creatures and infuse them with elemental magic in order to create their own elemental servitors.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast. Originally from Chattanooga, TN, his credits for Dungeons & Dragons® include *Monster Manual 3*, the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Fallen Lands*, *Player Essentials: Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*, and *Monster Vault*.

Broken Builder Cultist — Level 2 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid — XP 125

HP 37; **Bloodied** 18 — **Initiative** +5
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13 — **Perception** +0
Speed 6

Traits
☼ **Fanatical Aura ✦ Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn adjacent to the cultist provokes opportunity attacks if it moves or shifts out of this aura.

Standard Actions
⨺ **Obsidian Short Sword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage.
Effect: Until the end of the cultist's next turn, each time the target makes an attack against an enemy that is not a Broken Builder cultist, the target takes damage as though it had been hit by this attack.

⨺ **Rapid Strikes** (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** 5 6
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage.
Effect: Until the end of the cultist's next turn, each time the target makes an attack against an enemy that is not a Broken Builder cultist, the target takes damage as though it had been hit by this attack.

⨺ **Deep Wound** (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Effect: Until the end of the cultist's next turn, each time the target makes an attack against an enemy that is not a Broken Builder cultist, the target takes damage as though it had been hit by this attack.

Triggered Actions
Scatter ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The cultist is hit by a close or area attack that also includes one of its allies as a target.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The cultist shifts up to its speed. If the cultist ends this shift in a space outside of the area of the triggering attack, the attack does not hit the cultist.

Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 13 (+2)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment obsidian short sword

Broken Builder Recruiter — Level 2 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid — XP 125

HP 30; **Bloodied** 15 — **Initiative** +8
AC 16, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14 — **Perception** +6
Speed 6
Resist 5 necrotic

Traits
☼ **Elemental Blessing ✦ Aura** 10
Allies within the aura gain resist 5 to acid, cold, fire, lightning, and thunder damage.

Standard Actions
⨺/➶ **Bone Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 or Ranged 5 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Effective Recruitment (charm) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The recruiter chooses one adjacent enemy who can hear and understand the recruiter. Until the end of the recruiter's next turn, all melee and ranged attacks made against the recruiter instead target the chosen enemy. Additionally, while this effect is active, the recruiter deals an extra 2d6 damage with attacks against the chosen enemy.

Minor Actions
Psionic Mask (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The recruiter creates a psionic illusion that allows the recruiter to appear as any Medium humanoid until it uses *psionic mask* again or until it drops to 0 hit points. To create an illusion of a specific individual's form, the recruiter must have seen that individual. Other creatures can make a DC 20 Insight check to discern the presence of the psionic illusion.

Triggered Actions
Scatter ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The cultist is hit by a close or area attack that also includes one of its allies as a target.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The cultist shifts up to its speed. If the cultist ends this shift in a space outside of the area of the triggering attack, the attack does not hit the cultist.

Skills Bluff +8, Stealth +9
Str 10 (+1) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 12 (+2) **Cha** 14 (+3)

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment bone javelin

Broken Builder Defiler — Level 2 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid — XP 125

HP 31; **Bloodied** 15 — **Initiative** +1
AC 16, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +4
Speed 6
Resist 5 necrotic

Traits
☼ **Whipping Winds ✦ Aura** 1
The defiler slides any enemy that ends its turn in the defiler's aura 2 squares as a free action.

Standard Actions
⨺ **Bone Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 2 damage.

➶ **Bolt of Fire** (fire, force, implement) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 6 fire and force damage.
Miss: Half damage.

➶ **Lightning Javelin** (force, implement, lightning) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 2 lightning damage. On a critical hit, this attack deals an extra 5 force damage and knocks the target prone.

➶ **Thunder Fist** (implement, thunder) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 11 thunder damage and the target is deafened (save ends).
Miss: Half damage and the target is deafened until the end of the defiler's next turn.

Triggered Actions
Arcane Defiling ✦ At-Will (1/Round)
Trigger: The defiler misses with an attack roll.
Effect: Each of the defiler's allies within 20 squares takes 5 necrotic damage and the defiler rerolls the triggering attack roll, taking either result.

Scatter ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The cultist is hit by a close or area attack that also includes one of its allies as a target.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The cultist shifts up to its speed. If the cultist ends this shift in a space outside of the area of the triggering attack, the attack does not hit the cultist.

Skills Arcana +8
Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 11 (+1) **Wis** 17 (+4)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 14 (+3) **Cha** 12 (+2)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Equipment bone dagger

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

The Dracohar

by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by Wes Louie

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Sinister dragon-headed humans—as opposed to the more brutish and reptilian lizard folk and certain snake-headed, human-bodied yuan-ti—have long been a staple of Realms legend and scary fireside tales. Usually they feature as a fearsome alternative to the drow: ruthless, formidable raiders by night who pillage, murder, and carry off unfortunate humans to become slaves, food, or even breeding stock.

So run the tales, but recent daytime sightings of dragon-headed raiders have increased, coalescing around the Dread Hood of the trade roads.

The Dread Hood

During the last two summers, an unpredictable scourge has bedeviled overland trade routes in an area bounded by the Farsea Swamp to the northeast, Elturgard to the northwest, and the Snakewood to the south. Refusing to be tricked by lures and seemingly able to vanish when sought by spells, the Dread Hood doesn't attack often—but he pounces on especially choice cargoes and strikes at traveling merchants in widely different ways and places, making defense against him difficult. Thus far, this bandit leader has been devastatingly successful, and his small, swift band of warlocks, rogues, and fighters are utterly loyal and disciplined.

The Dread Hood is named for the black hood he wears over his head. The fabric covering his face sometimes emits a tendril of smoke or mist that reaches toward anyone he's facing. (The power and purpose of this isn't known; it doesn't appear to be an attack, but it does seem linked to the bandit's anger.) Under the hood, tales insist, is a red dragon head—on the shoulders of an otherwise "normal" athletic human male.

The Dread Hood tells his followers he has the head of a dragon because of a wizard's curse, but most sages don't believe that. They say a few dragon-headed humans have always lurked in the mountains all around the territory where the Dread Hood is active, and they believe the bandit leader is a member of this

subrace, or clan of aberrations, or breed of monster. Just what the dragon-headed humans are, sages can't agree on, although they can agree that they are certainly not dragonborn.

Andrammath's Guide

Over four decades ago, the now-dead sage Imbur Andrammath (the famous—or infamous—"Chronicler of Amn") published his *Guide to the Peoples of Amn*, in which he attempted to trace all nonpureblood humans who settled and dwelt in Amn, down to intermarriages of specific individuals with humans. From half-elves to apparently sterile ogre-human crossbreeds, Andrammath tirelessly noted all he could uncover. His writings include sober record to wild rumor, as well as the presence and details of every recorded intelligent Amnian who was not—in his opinion—wholly human.

Today, copies of the *Guide* are few and far between. Many mentioned in it did not welcome their heritage and doings being revealed—sometimes erroneously—to all the Realms. So they took every opportunity they could to destroy, damage, or hide every copy of the five-volume work. Andrammath eventually had to abandon work on a sixth, "update" volume and go into hiding, where he lived out his elder days pursuing his second great interest: the uses and properties of various wild mushrooms.

In the *Guide*, Andrammath wrote that dragon-headed humans are a "people" who have inhabited central Faerûn for over a century (at least six or seven generations, in instances he details), and call themselves "the Dracohar." The sage claimed dracohar are a race because they "bred true." That is, if they interbreed with humans or dragonborn, the offspring are always dracohar.

Never numerous and always seeking to hide their natures from humans and others (because of the near-universal fear and hostility their red-dragonlike heads evoke), the dracohar spread north and west from their origins in a tiny wizard's vale somewhere in the western Orsraun Mountains. If the Chronicler can be believed, the dracohar are a real-life example of that recurring terror of legend: a runaway "new breed" that began as the result of a wizard's failed attempt to breed servitor dragons.

In this case, the wizard was Kelkur the Mad, a thoroughly unpleasant recluse. Although his servitor project did not yield him the tame dragons he sought, the dracohar are one of his few successes. Their ability to use breath weapon attacks and their agility, wits, and deftness made them effective perimeter guards for Kelkur's vale (which they kept clear of orcs and hobgoblins). Their essential stability and hardiness made them a stable race capable of outliving their creator, not a band of sterile "mules" or unique individuals having no consistent abilities. Kelkur's spells mastered them, making them utterly obedient—and confined to the vale—until his death.

Kelkur attempted alchemical experiments with their flesh, blood, and scales, plus he tried to figure out a way he could acquire draconic breath weapon attacks for his own body, but he made little progress. His lack of progress wasn't because dracohar "vitals" lacked utility or because Kelkur failed in his investigations, but because he spent most of his time in pursuit of his other great interest: finding and learning how to control *all* of the portals in the Realms. Since this project consumed so much of his time, another side project he took on involved finding a way to transform his body so that he could live longer. Unfortunately, his attempts to transform himself resulted in a body that failed him, consuming all its vitality in a futile internal war with itself.

So, Kelkur ran out of time, dying before he could transform his own aging body into some sort of superhuman monster, and before he could learn much about the dracohar.

The Alchemy of Dracohar

Individual dracohar are as capable of practicing and seeking to master alchemy as humans, though little evidence exists indicating that any have done so. In response to this, scholars advance the ancient sages' caution: "If you have not seen something, it does not follow that it does not exist to be seen."

However, the few human alchemists who have examined dracohar report that the lung-sac organs associated with its breath weapon attacks collapse into gory ruin very swiftly after death—but that dracohar blood has several straightforward uses.

In short, dracohar blood is already of general interest to alchemists because of the following:

- Dracohar blood can be used as the main component in making *elixir of dragonbreath* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 186) or a *potion of resistance* against fire.
- Dracohar blood can be used in the creation of a *necklace of fireballs* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 153), a *ring of the phoenix* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 161), or (to a much lesser degree) a *radiant weapon* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 76).
- Distilled dracohar blood can be mixed with other (secret) ingredients to derive liquids equivalent in effect to *black dragon bile* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 193) or to a *flame rose* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 194), as well as several virulent poisons.

- Makers of magic armors are excited about the possible benefits (resistance to fire and increased melting points, suppleness rather than brittleness in extreme temperatures) of slaking armor plates in dracohar blood during forging, but experiments have thus far yielded disappointing and wildly varying—even contradictory—results.

In any of these cases, the DM may reduce the component cost of an Enchant Item ritual or alchemical formula by up to 10% if dracohar blood is used as part of the components. The exact reduction in cost and the amount of dracohar blood required are left to the DM. Dracohar blood is always hard to come by and, as with residuum, is seldom available on the open market. Typically, acquiring it is a quest in itself.

Dracohar Clans

For self-protection, dracohar have always lived in small "clans" of up to eight families, dwelling together and sending out fighting and hunting bands drawn from members of all of a clan's component families.

Dracohar display the same range of emotions, skills, aims, and mannerisms found in any sentient race, but their own racial stereotypes are patience, calmness even in battle or under great stress, and being close-mouthed with anyone not of their clan. (As the sage Rhondral of Memnon put it, dracohar ". . . say little and volunteer less, though what little they do utter tends to be calm and polite. I've never heard a dracohar threaten, but have heard several flatly promise dire consequences if those they were addressing do certain things.")

Dracohar are not known to venture deeply into the Underdark, but they tend to keep to caverns and mountain fastnesses, often competing with orcs for this "home" terrain. They use alpine valleys as grazing grounds and pens for herds of livestock they devour at will, and farm alpine plants and (in caverns) edible fungi. However, dracohar forage and hunt more than they farm, and they raid human settlements and caravans wherever available to seize human food, drink, and weapons.

Something in their nature makes dracohar enjoy wines and liqueurs (but not ale) as most humans do—but to suffer inebriation only after consuming amounts that would render most humans unconscious, poisoned, or violently ill. As a dwarf trail saying puts it: "Enter no drinking contests with a dragon-headed."

Using Dracohar in Your Campaign

Dracohar are nearly as varied as humans. If characters encounter and fight dracohar in the course of their travels, here's how to generate dracohar combat statistics.

- Begin with any human monster statistics block.
- Add the Dracohar Breath attack.
- Modify the creature's level as desired (be sure to use the updated numbers for damage by level from the 4th Edition Rules Update.

Minor Actions

Dracohar Breath (fire) ✦ **Encounter**

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); level +3 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + level fire damage.

The damage type is almost always fire, but other types of dracohar may exist with affinities to other dragon species.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

Episode 31: What More Can I Say

BY JAMES WYATT
illustration by Wayne England

It's with a heavy load of regret that I announce this is my final Dungeoncraft column. It's the 31st column I've written in this virtual space, and it's seen the birth of two campaigns—the second of which is still going strong. I enjoy writing about my campaign, I like sharing my insights into running the game as I discover them, and I like hearing feedback from readers who share in the pleasure of those discoveries.

On the other hand, my job has changed significantly at least twice since I started writing this column almost three years ago. When I started, I was the Lead Story Designer for D&D, sort of the right-brain partner of left-brain Rob Heinsoo, the Lead Mechanical Designer. About a year later, I was promoted to Design Manager, and a year and a half after that I made a lateral move to be Creative Manager—which is not too different from Lead Story Designer.

I mention my job shifts because of the sad reality that Dungeoncraft has increasingly fallen into the cracks—I end up writing it in the last moments before it's supposed to go online, squeezing it into the midst of a very full schedule of design, management, and meetings. I can't keep that up—it's too hard on me, and it's not really fair to readers. You come to the pages of *Dungeon* magazine expecting thoughtful, insightful advice that's going to help make your game better. I'm glad for the extent to which I've been able to provide that, but I certainly feel like I could've done more if I'd had more time to devote to each month's column.

So I figured I'd end my run in this illustrious chair (previously occupied by the likes of Ray Winninger and Monte Cook) by summing up my philosophy of campaign building, to end on a pithy note that ties it all together.

I think a sentence I uttered during our annual "Art of the Dungeon Master" panel at PAX Prime this year sums it up pretty well:

"If no one is paying you for writing your campaign material, **plagiarize everything.**"

Plagiarize Everything

At the panel, a well-meaning DM asked if it was all right for him to reuse material he wrote for one campaign in his next one. As if, somehow, he'd be depriving his new group of players, robbing them of the experience of having something new and wonderful created just for them.

Art patrons get to enjoy that experience, because they pay for it. Hence my answer: If your players are art patrons who pay you for your work in creating your campaign, by all means, earn your keep. Create new material just for them. Along similar lines, if you're planning to publish your campaign material and thus earn money for that work, it had better be original material or you could end up in legal trouble.

Unless one of those two rare circumstances applies to you, you must remember this important fact:

You're playing a game.

(Of course, if you're in school and writing papers for class, for which you are not getting paid, don't plagiarize anything!)

There's nothing wrong with spending time on your hobby—that's what hobbies are for. But no one should dictate to you how you spend your hobby time, and you should never feel obligated to spend more time on it than you want to.

Thousands of pages of published adventures and campaign settings are available. Thirty-five years' worth of material created for every edition of the game represents vastly more material than any group of players could ever use. Use it!

For my Greenbrier campaign, I talked about stitching together adventures from three different editions of D&D to form a campaign revolving around themes of corruption and Far Realm intrusion. For Aquela, I've done something similar, adding my own past work on that world into the mix, aiming toward themes of chaotic annihilation, lawful domination, and magic gone awry. One of my goals has been to show how you can use all the D&D books on your shelves, whether they're brand new releases or classics from the past, to build a campaign that's uniquely yours. I've talked about looting published campaigns and using character backgrounds to tie published adventures into the themes of your campaign. Essentially, I've been trying to encourage the process of rampant creative pillaging. Maybe a better way to put it is creative laziness—don't do more (creative) work than you need to, and especially don't do more than you want to.

Creative Laziness

If there's one theme running through the *Dungeon Master's Guide* that I think defines my perspective and sets it apart from past editions of that book, it's that even the Dungeon Master has a right to a life. I'm in my 40s, married with a young teenager in the house, working full-time and trying to make time for hobbies like music and theater that *aren't* D&D. One of my key goals for the 4th Edition D&D game was to make sure that the game allowed people like me to be DMs. Through the history of the game, it hasn't always been easy to be a busy (or lazy) DM—even if you only ran published adventures and plagiarized everything, sometimes the rule books (and the community of players) would make you feel guilty for it. I cited these past DMGs in an article I wrote for the release of 4th Edition:

> "What lies ahead will require the use of all your skill, put a strain on your imagination, bring your creativity to the fore, test your patience, and exhaust your free time."—1979
>
> "Creating a campaign of your own is the most difficult, but most rewarding, task a DM faces."—2000
>
> "Planning an entire campaign seems a daunting task, but don't worry—you don't have to plot out every detail right from the start. You can start off with the basics, running a few adventures (whether published or those you design yourself), and later think about larger plotlines you want to explore. You're free to add as much or as little detail as you wish."—2008

One of the themes I keep coming back to is that, despite my past experience with the game and my current employment, I no longer believe that a DM's most important and illustrious work is world-building. For the purposes of your game, a few strong themes, evocative place-names, and memorable NPCs will get you a lot more bang for your buck than a world map, extensive history, and dozens of unique cultural details. Tolkien was a world-builder, and generations of DMs have longed to follow in his footsteps. There's nothing wrong with that—what's wrong is making more practical, busy, or lazy DMs feel bad if they don't share that aspiration.

From that perspective, I've hit a couple of highlights of creative laziness:

- **Start small!** Start the campaign with a small starting area and build outward from it.
- **Steal maps:** If you, like me, hate drawing maps, then steal them and modify them as necessary.
- **Pillage creatively:** Steal elements and opponents from published adventures even if you don't use the adventures as written.
- **Hit the library!** The fact that something was written for a past edition of the game is no reason not to use it in your current game.
- **The D&D World:** Three different DMs can take the same basic starting material, found in the DMG, and turn it into three very different campaigns.
- **Steal from yourself!** If you had good ideas in past campaigns, there's nothing wrong with using them again.

- **Assist your brainstorming:** I coined the term "assisted brainstorming" to describe my process of generating ideas for my new campaign by browsing through notes from my old campaigns.
- **Weave in published adventures:** Putting the DMG's advice to use in making a published adventure part of your own campaign themes.

What Else to Say?

Given that my major theme for this column has been, "Don't do more work than you need to," I feel that I'm running out of things to talk about. In the final analysis, that's much more important than the numerous tasks competing for my time in retiring from Dungeoncraft: I think I've made my point. Belaboring it runs counter to the whole message. If making a campaign is easy, I shouldn't need more than 30 columns to tell you how to do it!

So there it is. Thanks for reading all over the years, thanks for your input and feedback in forums and conventions, and thanks for taking on the not-as-hard-as-it-used-to-be-and-really-quite-rewarding job of Dungeon Master. I hope it remains rewarding for you and you keep having fun, whatever your level of time investment in the job.

For all the stress of getting this column written month after month, I've had a lot of fun with it. Most importantly, my game has gotten better because of it. My hope is that the same is true for you.

About the Author

James Wyatt is the Creative Manager for D&D R&D at Wizards of the Coast. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He also contributed to the *Eberron Campaign Setting*, and is the author of several Dungeons & Dragons® novels set in the world of Eberron.

Essentials Survival Guide

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
illustration by Rob Alexander

Unless you've been hiding under a rock for the past few months, you probably know that the Dungeons & Dragons® Essentials line is the new hotness. But you may also be asking the question, "how essential is it for me?" This month, I'll help you answer that question.

If you are anything like me—a Dungeons & Dragons nerd—you'll probably want to pick up all the Essentials products out of a mixed sense of fanboy curiosity and the need to have a complete D&D collection. But I also know that, with the state of the economy, not all of you are as eager as me to part with hard-earned cash, and you are probably wondering what in the Essentials line is ... well, essential.

If You Can Buy Only One ...

Assuming—as I do in this column—that you are a Dungeon Master who runs games at least occasionally, the one Essentials product that I would absolutely recommend getting first is the *Rules Compendium*. First off, it's a pretty handy book—it has the grand majority of the rules for D&D, all updated and compacted into a smaller, lighter, and easier-to-transport 320-page tome. If like me you run some of your games away from your home, this book is the next best thing to having it on Amazon's Kindle application with a tablet.

Not only is it handy, there are a fair number of revisions and new and interesting stuff in the *Rules Compendium*. First and foremost, at least in my mind, is the section on skill challenges (pages 157-163). While much of it is a rehash of old information (and there has been soooo much written on the subject of skill challenges), there is some new tech there. The first is a list of typical DCs that gives you a little more guidance on what's a good frequency of moderate and hard checks to sprinkle through your challenges. For you old warhorses, this will seem like common sense, but it's a boon for those who may still be having trouble fine-tuning their skill challenges.

The second major bit of tech is advantages.

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For skill challenges of complexity 3 or higher, advantages are a way in which you, the DM, can add an "easy button." There are four of these advantages that allow you to gain more from a skill check success or remove a failure instead of gaining a success. The rules on advantages also state that you should add these rules to skill challenges of complexity 3 or higher, so in a way they are a bit of stealth errata for all higher complexity skill challenges.

Skill challenges aside, the entire chapter on skills is a must read. There have been numerous adjustments and tweaks to skills in current updates, and they are all in *Rules Compendium*. There are even a few new changes sprinkled here and there—for instance, for characters trained in Arcana, detecting the presence of magic now only takes a standard action instead a full minute. No more waiting until the end of the encounter to search for that magical loot! The chapter also contains the newest and greatest incarnation of the Difficulty Class by Level chart. The math is better, and it is handled on a per-level basis rather than every three levels. If you want to use it right away and get some great commentary on the changes, Stephen "Shoe" Shubert has a fantastic *Design & Development* article about it in this month's issue of *Dragon Magazine*.

Rules Compendium also gives you information on the new magic item rarity scheme and a new way to randomly determine treasure per level.

While the *Rules Compendium* is a boon for any Dungeon Master, there are a few blind spots you should be aware of. Information on rituals is slim, to put it mildly. Rituals just get a general sidebar on page 134. If you're waist deep in the paragon tier or higher, your players are probably finding more uses for rituals. The new magic item rarity rules seem to be partially designed to free up liquid treasure for other uses, so for some of you, this will be a tad annoying. *Rules Compendium* also leaves out some of the rules for weapon properties in the game (, defensive, stout, and fan-favorite brutal) along with rules on double weapons. There is no mention of backgrounds (at least backgrounds with mechanical elements), themes, the piloting vehicle rules, and some other things that tend to be more DM-centric, so they will poke their heads up in the *Dungeon Master's Kit*. If you use those rules in your game, you will want to supplement your *Rules Compendium* with a cheat sheet.

What About All That Other Stuff?

The first thing to keep in mind is that the main goal of Essentials is to serve as a starting point for new players. That doesn't mean current players can't be excited about the new options presented in *Heroes of the Fallen Lands* or *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*. Rules monkeys in particular will want to use them. It doesn't hurt you to be familiar with these books, but they are written to be player- rather than DM-focused, so don't feel like you must have them—leave that to your players. One thing you will want to check out is the updates to existing rules that are presented in *Heroes of the Fallen Lands* (and a similar file that will surely be released with *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdom*). You also should read Mike Mearls's explanation for the rationale driving some of those changes.

More DM love will come in later months with both the *Dungeon Master's Kit* and *Monster Vault*. If you're an old pro at the DMing game, these products will merely supplement your already formidable arsenal of tools with new monsters, adventures, advice, and mapping aids. There are neat things you haven't seen before, which is always a treat, but unless you are still feeling a little uneasy as a DM, you can live without them. I'll be buying the *Dungeon Master's Kit* for the new and updated DM's Screen alone (though I'm sure I will enjoy Rich Baker's adventure, and the advice and rules presented in the DM's book). As far as *Monster Vault* goes, I'm always a sucker for new monsters.

The same can be said for the *Dungeon Tiles Master Set*. If you missed out on earlier sets, you will want this. If you already have a bunch of dungeon tiles, then you can afford to wait—put this on your holiday wish list. You can never have too many dungeon tiles, at least in my opinion. My wife has a different opinion on the matter.

At the end of the day, the Essentials line doesn't change the game you've been playing since the release of 4E. It codifies updates, and provides a new, arguably easier, and less expensive starting point for new players. It's a boon for those things alone. It affects your ongoing campaign only when someone rolls up a new character using its options. Still, for the DM, it provides some great tools ... and DMs love great tools.

Earn D&D Karma: Become a Red Box/ Essentials Mentor

The one item I haven't talked about is the *D&D Starter Set*, or so-called Red Box (well, because it's red and it's a box!). Most of you will only want to pick it up for the nostalgia value. Its Larry Elmore cover art and full-on 1981 time machine text treatment feels like coming home. Oh, and it looks oh-so sharp sitting in the gaming cabinet! But more so than any Essential's product, this is a product that will see little use from a Dungeons & Dragons Insider.

That said, it is great point of introduction for the uninitiated, and you may want to become familiar with it for another reason—to mentor other potential players and Dungeon Masters. Lately a group of my students, maybe sick of hearing me wax philosophical about tabletop RPGs and D&D in particular, decided to pick it up and have a go. These teenage and 20-something video game fanatics are now hooked, and I'm having a blast guiding them through the finer points of tabletop RPG fun.

Bear in mind I'm not running the game for them. One of the great things about the Starter Set is that it not only guides new players through the concepts and procedures of the game, it also trains new DMs to run the game. It's been a blast helping a budding DM find points of clarity with the rules and edge him on to greater adventure after the contents of that set have been exhausted. After all, helping create more DMs is the best thing we can do for the hobby!

On to the Letters!

If you're new to this column, every month I endeavor to provide helpful advice to the Dungeon Master out in game space. Admittedly I focus on advice to newer DMs, using years accumulated wisdom, error, and observation to help them avoid problems and get out of DMing jams. I also do this by answering questions that you, the DM on the ground, send me through the Save My Game group on the Wizards Community. If you have a problem, a question, or further suggestions and insights for your fellow DM, I suggest you become part of the Save My Game conversation there.

Here are a few of the questions posted on that group in the past month.

Aid Another, Again and Again

My group has trouble roleplaying. We've been through about five sessions, and they are about to reach level 3, but they still don't get the roleplaying aspect of the game. They continually pause to discuss tactics and rules wordings, so that when the Diplomacy check is made it's not entirely the PC who made it. To a certain extent I'm fine with this; I allow two people to assist and let them give advice on how to phrase things. However, recently it has become a hassle in combat. Originally I did not stop it because they were getting used to their characters, but now I'm having trouble with them planning out tactics that they would not be able to do in a combat encounter. For instance, they go into detailed plans of who should use what power and such.

How do I make them come up with their own decisions instead of deciding as a group? I've tried giving them six syllables per combat round, and they either make ridiculous sentences that couldn't possibly convey meaning ("Tweak missile staff!") or ignore the rule when I'm busy with another player. Help would be much appreciated.

–Hjs102, from the Save My Game Group

One of the great things about Dungeons & Dragons is that it is a game with a lot of breadth. Some players really get into the roleplaying. Some groups really get into the rules. Some of the best groups have a balanced love of both. It sounds like you have a lot of rules monkeys.

While I understand your concerns about slowing down the game, teamwork is also part of D&D, and there are quite a few DMs who would love the level of teamwork, cooperation, and engagement that your players are exhibiting. The best thing you can do may be to try to not let it bother you. It's going to be hard to stop even if you try, and you may end up accomplishing nothing except squashing their enthusiasm for the game.

During my last session, the rogue in my group was dead, and during the 8 hours it took for the wizard to cast the Raise Dead ritual, the group had to figure out how to prepare for and harass an invasion from a very large hobgoblin army. During the discussion, the person playing the rogue kept giving advice to the other characters. I reminded the player a couple of times that her character was dead, and asked her how she was having this conversation with the other players. This flustered her a bit, because she really wanted to participate in the game. She told me, "These were conversations we had before I died during short and extended rests." Good enough for me! We moved on. She was happy and engaged, and it got me out of a position of having to (futilely) tell her to zip it every five minutes.

On a rules note, you may want to check out the update on the aid another rules (listed as "Cooperation" in the *Player's Handbook*). There are now new, harder DCs (10 + half character's level) and a penalty for failure (-1 to the skill check instead of +1), which makes those rules less certain and more dynamic.

My Players Hate My NPCs!

I seem to have an unfortunate knack for getting my players to hate my NPCs. Often what I think are subtle hints that a character is not trustworthy make my players ready throw down right away.

I had one scene go off the rails when a hated NPC was chasing a spy from the PCs' organization, and the PCs jumped in on the side of the spy! Note that this NPC had been a vocal opponent of the PCs within the rebellion, accusing them of showboating and taking risks—nothing deserving of a death sentence (or so I thought). Fortunately, they didn't kill her, but took great satisfaction in beating her into unconsciousness.

In another instance, the PCs picked up very early that the mad wizard of the rebellion was not to be trusted. When it was finally revealed that the wizard was being cruelly manipulated by the villains to get him to betray the PCs, they were far from sympathetic.

Often I have to remind the players of the reasons that direct opposition to these NPCs is impractical, and they only grudgingly put down the giant mallet of NPC splattage. How can I channel this potentially useful player enthusiasm such that the PCs don't devolve into bullies who beat up anybody that rubs them the wrong way?

—Goken100, from the Save My Game Group

This is a constant DM dilemma, especially for a DM who likes to have NPCs with shades of gray. There are exceptions, I know, but over the years I've found that PCs are simple creatures, even when their players are not. Even a player who loves relativist fiction and rich character dramas will often reach for weapon or implement at the slightest hint of betrayal.

I've found that there are a few reasons for this. First and foremost, D&D PCs are almost always spoiling for a fight. Fighting is fun, most characters are built with fighting in mind, and—let's face—it the reasons for fighting in D&D are nearly as shallow as they are abundant. Imagine if the real world worked that way; you would see more wanton violence than a zombie apocalypse. Another reason is that the characters are pretty self absorbed. They will forget subtleties concerning the personality and background of your NPCs, because they are typically focused on the subtleties of their own characters (typically subtleties on how to optimize their combat efficiency).

If you want them to understand the motives of your NPCs, try to be less subtle. That doesn't mean that your NPCs can't have complex motivations. It does mean that you need to be more direct when letting your players in on the subtleties, and remind them frequently.

For instance, I don't know how the wizard in your second example was being manipulated, but having the PCs find and rescue his kidnapped family (or familiar?) would have been a great way of getting the point across. Making a connection in a direct and visceral way instead of a more philosophical way makes character care more, because they had something to do with its resolution. PCs are very results-oriented creatures—that's one of the many reasons they're always spoiling for a fight.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland caught the D&D bug at an impressionable age. Once the content manager for the RPGA, and a developer for the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons® rules, he is now a freelance game designer doing work for Wizards of the Coast and Paizo Publishing, and he is part of a fledgling group of game commentators and game designers called NeoGrognard. During the daylight hours, he teaches game production classes at the International Academy of Design and Technology of Seattle.